

THE BRIDE

OF THE

FIRST NIGHT.

BY

CH. PAUL DE KÖCK.

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CHAPTER I.

A HUSBAND WHO IS A SPORTSMAN.

‘JEANNETTE!’

‘Madame?’

‘What sort of weather is it this morning? I must know what to put on, as we are going to dine at Madame Dartinelle’s, for there are certain to be a lot of people there. All the gentlemen in the neighbourhood have been asked to go out shooting, and then we are to eat the game that they have killed.’

‘If you eat no game but what Monsieur Rocaille has killed, the chances are that you will not have much, for he is not very lucky most days.’

‘Hold your tongue, Jeannette; just suppose my husband were to hear you, who sets up for being a great sportsman!’

‘Great sportsman, indeed! Why, he has already killed two of his dogs, which, I suppose, he mistook for hares.’

‘Not at all, it was a pure accident; one was killed by a poacher——’

‘Whom nobody could ever find!’

‘And the other was cowering in a thicket when a wolf attacked him——’

‘That’s what Monsieur Rocaille says, but there have not been any wolves in this neighbourhood, and that wolf has never been found any more than the poacher. Now, whenever I see monsieur taking out Moufflard, who is such a good dog, and does every-

thing that he is told, I am always afraid that something will happen to him.'

'To my husband?'

'No, madame, to the dog.'

'Now, Jeannette, I asked you what sort of weather it was, and you have given me no answer.'

'It is tolerably fine, madame, but there is wind enough to blow a cow's horns off.'

'Good heavens, and my husband is going out!'

'Well, monsieur is pretty substantially built, and if the wind tried to carry him away he would hold on to Moufflard, who is substantial also, and as big as a donkey. But as for being a sporting dog, why, he never was a sporting dog.'

'But Monsieur Rocaille said he would break him.'

'If he breaks him in as he did the other two, poor Moufflard will not last long.'

'Be quiet, Jeannette, here is my husband coming.'

The preceding conversation took place at Fontenay-aux-Roses, in the house of M. Rocaille, who had retired from business with a nice fortune and a very pretty wife, who was, however, a great flirt. Léocadie was fifteen years younger than her husband, and was then getting on for thirty-five; but with her light brown hair, her large blue eyes, her good complexion, pretty mouth and dimpled cheeks, she was far from looking her age. She would have been still nicer if she had not often spoilt the gifts with which nature had graced her by her pretensions and coquetry. Certainly her fresh rosy lips had no need of the red lip salve which she often thought fit to put upon them, nor did her naturally delicate skin require the violet or the rose powder with which she would insist upon covering it. But women never will learn that very often *the best* is the enemy of what is really good in itself, and that painting the face is never the best, but rather the contrary.

But let us leave Léocadie and her coquetry alone,

for we cannot cure her of it, and it is, after all, excusable in a woman, for they are only coquettish in order to please us, which is very kind of them. Let us pass on to her husband.

We have already said that he is fifteen years older than Léocadie, which would make him about fifty, but he is still as brisk and as lively as any young man. Ernest Rocaille is of middle height and not too stout, his round face is very like one of those heads which we see so beautifully curled and dressed in the windows of hairdressers' shops. He has very bright eyes, which he fancies are very sly; his nose, which is rather thick, spoils the symmetry of his features, but it, like his eyes, seems to wish to find out everything, and, as a matter of fact, the senses of smell and hearing are two very powerful auxiliaries, and it is very difficult to keep anything concealed from them for any length of time.

Though M. Rocaille was not so vain as his wife, he still thought himself very captivating, and was delighted when his wife called to him: *Ernest!*

He was, besides, a great eater, a tremendous liar, and a great lover of the fair sex. Greedy as a cat, boastful as a dentist, with great pretensions to shrewdness and sagacity; such was the man who now came into his wife's room in full shooting costume—that is to say, having everything about him that is supposed to be necessary for the slaughter of game.

'Here I am,' he said, letting the stock of his gun down on the floor with a crash. 'How do you think I look? Am I not just like *Maleager*?'

'Good heavens, my dear, you actually frighten me with all that equipment, and then I have not the least idea who this *Maleager* is, whom you say you resemble.

'He was the son of *Oeneus* and *Althea*, and killed the wild boar whom *Diana* had sent to ravage the

country of *Calydon*. He married *Atalanta*, who had also wounded the boar——'

'That will do; how should I know all these people?'

'I think your game bag is big enough, sir,' Jeannette said slyly.

'Very likely it will not be big enough to hold everything I hope to shoot, my girl.'

'Where is *Moufflard*? I don't see him.'

'He is down below; at least I hope so. He certainly does not seem very eager after sport, but I will break him to it. But I must make haste, or I shall be late, for I am sure the other gentlemen have all assembled by this time.'

'Where are you to meet?'

'At Madame *Dartinelle*'s, the beautiful *Hortense Dartinelle*'s——'

'I wish you would break yourself of the habit of saying "the beautiful" every time you speak of that lady, who after all is not such an extraordinary beauty. I really think it is silly, pitiable, unbearable, and very rude towards the other ladies who may hear you.'

'My dear, I only say it because all the other gentlemen call her so when they speak of the fair widow, so I am only following their example.'

'Well, it only shows that all those gentlemen are idiots, that's all!'

'Well, *Léocadie*, I must say you are very unfair towards our neighbours. I will make you a present of *Gateau*, the sportsman, or rather the man who fancies himself a sportsman; as for him, since the dinner he gave us at his house I owe him a grudge, and I will pay him out. But *George Varicourt*, Madame *Dartinelle*'s brother, he is a thorough good jolly fellow, who enjoys life, and *Brochenbiche*, the barrister, he is very agreeable when he does not fancy himself ill; he certainly has not got much to

say, but I hate men who are so fond of chatting that one can never get in a word even edgeways. And then there is Gontran Dalby, George's intimate friend; why, I heard you say yourself that he was a charming young man.'

'I said so of M. Gontran? Nothing of the sort, I am sure, never!'

'What, never? Why, only three days ago when we were coming back from spending the evening at Madame Dartinelle's you said to me: "What a nice fellow M. Gontran is; how well he sings, and how charming he is in society." I don't know what he may have done to you since, for you to talk so differently now.'

'What he has done to me? What do you think he has done to me, I should like to know? I think it is extremely nice of you to speak to me like that. Do you fancy that he troubles his head about me, I wonder?'

'I did not mean to make you angry; you seem to take everything amiss this morning. Surely a man can be polite and attentive to ladies without there being any harm in it?'

'If M. Gontran is paying attention to anybody, one can easily see who is the object of them. Hortense Dartinelle knows all about that.'

'What, do you really think that he is in love with the handsome——no, no, I won't call her *the handsome widow*, as you don't like it; I will say the pretty——'

'Call her handsome, pretty, frightful, anything you like, what on earth do I care?'

'Well, it is very strange, for I think I can always find out the most secret love affairs, and yet I never noticed that Gontran was in love with his friend's sister.'

'There are a good many more things that escape your notice!'

'Do you think so! But, bless me, I am talking and keeping them waiting for me. Jeannette, just look whether Moufflard is in the yard.'

'He is not there, sir.'

'Call him, will you, he always comes for you.'

'I hope you are not going to bring your great big dog up into my room; he is sure to break something—'

'Yes, you are quite right, Léocadie, I will go downstairs after him. Good bye, my dear; I shall see you again at the handsome widow's. Oh, confound it! I said "handsome" again; it slipped out unawares. Dinner is at six o'clock; be sure not to keep us waiting.'

'That's a thing I never do.'

'Well, I'm off—something tells me that I am going to have a capital day's sport.'

'Be sure and take great care of Moufflard, sir, so that he may not come across a wolf or a poacher.'

'Just stick to your pots and kettles, Jeannette, if you please!'

M. Rocaille took leave of his wife, and went to look after his dog in the yard, in the garden, and in the street, and at last he found him and called him. Moufflard, who did not seem to have the slightest taste for sport, did not follow his master, but kept going under a window where Jeannette and another young servant were; and as she delighted in playing her master a trick, she kept calling and enticing the dog to her.

M. Rocaille, who fancied that he could see everything, did not notice these goings on, and, at last, to put an end to the matter, he made up his mind to resort to strong measures, and so put a string round Moufflard's neck, and started to go shooting, dragging his dog after him by a leash.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER HOUSE, AND OTHER SPORTSMEN.

THE place of meeting was at the house of Madame Hortense Dartinelle, whom the men (you must notice that it was the men and not the women) called *the handsome widow*, for it is very rare for the stronger sex to make a mistake when they praise the weaker. Whatever ladies may say, a man is much more capable of appreciating their pleasing and charming qualities than they are in each other, and though he may sometimes be the dupe of appearances, he very soon discovers any good qualities where they exist; whilst amongst women there is always a feeling of jealousy which prevents them from being just towards each other.

Madame Dartinelle is twenty-eight years old. She has a little, elegant, well-made figure, and is dark, with eyes that are almost as black as her hair. Her features are regular, though her face generally has a serious and often almost a stern look. She rarely smiles, though she has magnificent teeth; her complexion is pale, and she has, altogether, a somewhat melancholy expression, which seems fitted to inspire and to feel real love.

Married very young, she was not happy in her relations, for her husband was a thoroughly debauched fellow who, luckily for her, died before having time to squander all his fortune, and at twenty-four years of age Hortense was left a widow with an income of fifteen thousand francs a year. She had many aspirants for her hand, and many a man hoped to be fortunate enough to persuade Madame Dartinelle to put a term to her widowhood, but the lady put off all her suiters by declaring that

she did not intend to marry again, for she found herself far too comfortable to wish to change her condition. They were obliged, therefore, to give up all hopes of winning the lady, for her impassive face and conversation gave no other kind of hope to the would-be lovers whom she refused as husbands.

George Varicourt is Madame Dartinelle's brother. He is about forty years of age, and not at all like his sister, either in appearance or in character. He is a stout, jovial fellow, always merry, with a continual smile on his lips and a joke on his tongue. He is what may be called rather 'fast,' and having been in the habit of indulging rather too much in his fondness for the table, he is now obliged, for the sake of his stomach, to impose some restraint on his appetite; he has even been advised to follow some strict rules of diet, but he declares that he would rather not live at all than not live well. Having run through half his property, and only having between seven and eight thousand francs a year left, he now passes part of the summer with his sister in the country, where he saves money and drinks less champagne.

Hortense is constantly giving her brother sermons of prudence, and says to him :

'George, you have already had gastric fever once, and if you are not careful you will have it again, and the doctor warned you that people very rarely get over a second attack.'

And George answers :

'My dear sister, your medical man is very wrong to say that one cannot recover from such and such an illness! Now, if I were a doctor, I should say just the opposite and should keep repeating, even to a patient who was most seriously ill: "It is nothing at all; you will be out and about in a few days, and meanwhile eat and drink whatever you like." I will

bet that with such a system I should effect a great many more cures than other physicians.'

Madame Dartinelle's country house was one of the prettiest and most comfortable in Fontenay-aux-Roses. It was large, and could accommodate at least half-a-dozen friends, if necessary. Of course there was a billiard-room for the men and a bagatelle table for the ladies, and all other games that are indispensable in the country. It had a large well laid-out garden; there was water and a large fountain in which one could have taken a bath, and a cool dark grotto which seemed to have been made expressly for lovers' meetings. It was, in fact, altogether a most agreeable residence, and there were plenty of roses about it, for it is well known that they are the principal produce and chief ornament of that part of the country, and no one would be worthy of living at Fontenay-aux-Roses who did not cultivate the flower from which it takes its name.

George Varicourt often took several friends with him when he went to see his sister in the country. For some time he had been on very intimate terms with Gontran Dalby, whose character was very much like his own. He was, however, ten years younger than stout George, but, like him, he was rather fast, and an excellent companion; and if he was not so fond of good living as his friend, he was much more addicted to women. His gallant adventures had made a great sensation, and at thirty he was mentioned as a most dangerous lady's man, a veritable *Don Juan*, whom no woman could resist.

He was good looking, amiable, merry and witty, and he was a general favourite because he never showed off, and seemed to be quite ignorant of his own good qualities,—so much so, that he often seemed timid and embarrassed when in a lady's company; and these clever tactics always succeeded.

When George said to his sister: 'I shall bring Gontran Dalby with me,' she replied:

'My dear brother, I do not see why you should wish to bring this gentleman, who has by no means a good reputation, to my house. He does nothing but deceive women and fight duels with their husbands, and everybody says that he is rather a disreputable fellow.'

'But you must not believe all the silly things that people say. I assure you that Gontran is a very amiable, witty man, and such are rare,—this you know as well as I do, and when one happens to meet with one, it is only right to get hold of him. Besides, what does it matter to you if Gontran has had some intrigues and deceived some women; are you frightened of him and afraid that he should seduce you?'

'Well, I am hardly afraid of that, George!'

'You may be quite easy, for he will not even pay you any attentions, for I told him that he would be only wasting his time, as you were not in the habit of receiving lovers well.'

'What—you told him that?'

'Certainly I did. Was there any harm in it?'

'It seems to me that you need not have taken upon yourself to say that, for that is one of those things which a woman likes to do or to say herself.'

'I have no patience with you. One can never do anything right for a woman.'

Some time after this conversation Gontran had accepted George's invitation, who had introduced him to his sister. She had expected to see a senseless, noisy, hairbrained fellow, and was very much surprised to see a young man of admirably correct manners, who paid his respects to her almost without looking at her, and who was much more reserved in his language than her brother was. From that time he was always welcome at Fontenay-aux-Roses;

first of all he spent the day there, then he returned and spent several days, till at last he became one of the most regular guests at the pleasant country house. Their intercourse, however, was always cool, though friendly. When they happened to be alone, Gontran spoke but little, and one might have thought that he feared to express his thoughts; and on her part the beautiful widow was more serious and pensive than usual. They would often be together for several minutes, apparently studying each others' characters, but as soon as a third person arrived Gontran regained all his cheerfulness; he grew animated, kept up the conversation, and Hortense herself was obliged to smile at the smart and witty things that he introduced into his conversation.

What reason, then, could Madame Rocaille, who did not like to hear her called *the handsome widow*, have for alleging that Gontran Dalby was in love with her when he was so reserved and almost timid in her presence? The reason most likely was, that women often see things clearly which men cannot even see through a microscope.

George had got up the shooting party, to which we saw M. Rocaille dragging his dog Moufflard by main force. Gontran is a tolerably bad shot, but, nevertheless, he wished to make one of them. Nine o'clock at Madame Dartinelle's was the appointed time of meeting, and though, as has been said, Gontran was not much of a sportsman, he said to his friend:

'Nine o'clock is rather late to meet for a shooting party. We ought to start at sunrise, or even before, for the fields to find partridges.'

But his stout friend answered: 'I am very fond of shooting, but I like to do it comfortably, without disturbing myself. I generally get up late, and I don't want to curtail my sleep to go and hunt after game, for we shall find it just as well at nine o'clock

as at four o'clock in the morning. After all, when I go out shooting, it is more to get an appetite than for anything else, for I don't reckon much on the game that we shall kill. I am not a good shot, you don't care for the sport, Rocaille generally shoots nothing except the dogs, so that there is nobody left except our neighbour Brochenbiche, who says that he never comes home without having killed some game; but we shall see.'

This neighbour Brochenbiche is a tall thin man, with a rather original sort of face, and who always thinks himself ill—in fact, he is never out of pain, according to his own account: now he has a pain in his head, then in his stomach and next in his back; his heart or his liver is attacked; he is suffering from rheumatism or the gout; and one never sees him without his dragging his legs after him, or holding his side. When asked how he is, he shakes his head and replies: 'H'm, I am not at all well; I shall not last much longer now.' But he has been saying the same thing for the last twenty years, and yet he has never been confined to his bed, and his ailments do not prevent him from having an excellent appetite, and he very often goes out shooting because his doctor has ordered him to do so.

Madame Rosina Brochenbiche is a decidedly stout, very cheerful and friendly dame, who does not appear to be the least anxious about her husband's ailments—in fact she declares that he fancies he is ill without really being so, but that he likes to be coddled, and is very fond of different sorts of herb teas, so long as they are made nice and sweet, so that whilst M. Brochenbiche is feeling himself all over to find out where he has a pain, his wife often begins to laugh and says: 'You see, he does not even know whether it is on the right or the left side; he has quite forgotten where it was this morning.'

M. Brochenbiche gets very angry at her jokes,

and says to his wife: 'I suppose you will never believe that I am ill till I die, and you will not be sorry for having made fun of all my sufferings till it is too late,' and she generally replies: 'My dear, if I shed tears for all your aches and pains every time you complain, my eyes would be so red that I should frighten you, and I do not wish to do that.'

The sportsmen met in a large room on the ground floor of Madame Dartinelle's house. Gontran, who has on a very elegant shooting suit which he very seldom wears, has on this occasion taken care that nothing shall be wanting in his appointments, and he carries his gun, game bag, powder flask, and all a sportsman's necessities with graceful ease. Fat George Varicourt has buckled in his waistband very tightly, so that his stomach may not be in his way when he wants to run; neighbour Rocaille has just arrived, still holding his dog in the leash, and Moufflard does not seem at all inclined to hunt after partridges. Last of all, Broc-en-biche appears with his head covered with two skull caps, one of cotton and the other of black silk, over which he has put a huge travelling cap with flaps fastened down over the ears. He comes up coughing and limping a little, and when he is asked how he is, he shakes his head and grumbles out:

'H'm, I am not well; I keep coughing and have a pain in my back. It wants a lot of pluck to go out shooting in my state of health.'

'But you were not obliged to come; you had better have stopped in bed.'

'I am perfectly aware that I was not obliged to go out shooting, but it is as well to take a little exercise, and then there is the pleasure of your society, besides which I am passionately fond of partridges.'

'Gentlemen,' George said, 'I propose that we drink a glass of Madeira before starting, as a pre-

ventative against the ill effects of the morning fog.'

'I quite agree with you,' Gontran replied: 'one ought never to go out without first taking something.'

'I have already had my cup of chocolate,' Rocaille said, 'but that makes no difference, and the Medeira will do instead of the glass of water after it, which, by the way, I never take.'

M. Brochenbiche blew his nose, and said: 'Medeira in the morning! h'm, I think it is rather heating, it might get into one's head.'

'You are not obliged to take it,' George observed to him.

'I know that perfectly well, but I like to do as others do, and so I will venture on a thimbleful.'

The wine is brought, poured out and tasted. M. Brochenbiche, who only took it that he might do as others did, does a great deal better, for he has his glass filled twice more, and says:

'It is very strange, but I think it is doing my cold good; I must buy some.'

'Is there plenty of game about here?' Gontran asked.

'Upon my word I don't know. This is the first time since I have been staying with my sister that I have thought about going out shooting; but you, Rocaille, who have lived here for some time, can tell us all about this.'

'I have not been out shooting very often,' was his answer, 'and I have always had an accident with my dog.'

'To-day you don't appear to be very fortunate in the matter of dogs. Why are you keeping him tied up?'

'Because otherwise he would bolt and run off home.'

'Then what is the good of him for shooting? You surely cannot scamper along with him?'

‘When we are in the open country, away from the village, I can let him go, for he will not think about running home then; but shall we not have the pleasure of seeing Madame Dartinelle before we start?’

‘I hardly think so, for ladies are not generally visible so early in the morning.’

‘But Madame Dartinelle is not like others, for I see her in the garden, and she is coming towards us.’

The handsome widow, who liked to get up early to go into the garden and attend to her flowers, was just coming into the room where the sportsmen were assembled. She was not one of those ladies who do not venture to show *themselves* in the morning because they have not yet painted their faces; Hortense was always charming, even immediately on getting out of bed, perhaps even most at that moment. It must not, however, be imagined that she had neglected her toilette, and it was only natural, when gentlemen going out shooting meet at a lady’s house, that she should bestow some pains upon it. It was the beginning of September and the weather was fine, although already rather cool. Hortense had on a light blue dress buttoned up to the neck in front, a small straight collar came down on to her shoulders, and a black silk band round her waist set off its slimness. Her beautiful hair required no headdress, and her small arched feet were shod in little boots of the same colour as her dress. Everything was well cut, well made, and well put on and worn, and in spite of Léocadie Rocaille one might certainly say ‘the handsome Madame Dartinelle,’ without being taxed with flattery.

‘Why, gentlemen,’ she said, greeting them, ‘not started yet?’

‘My dog detained me,’ Rocaille said.

‘I am in pain again,’ Brochebiche observed.

‘We must congratulate ourselves on being late,’ Gontran continued, ‘as it has procured us the pleasure of seeing you before starting, madame.’

She smiled slightly at this compliment, and asked :

‘At what time shall you be in to luncheon, gentlemen?’

‘We shall not lunch here,’ George answered, ‘but shall eat a morsel wherever we happen to be, and reserve all our appetite for dinner, so you may reckon on us by half-past six at the latest.’

‘That is right, and I hope M. Rocaille and M. Brochenbiche have told their wives.’

‘Certainly, they are coming to spend the day with you; and now, gentlemen, let us start.’

But at the very moment when they were going to do so, a fresh individual, also with a gun and in shooting dress, came into the room.

‘Why, here is Oswald Lambert!’ George cried. ‘Upon my word, my dear fellow, you come just in time, for we were on the point of setting out.’

‘So I see; but let me first of all pay my respects to Madame Dartinelle.’

The new comer was a young, well-made man, with a very good head; his features were correct, and no fault was to be found with his nose, mouth, or eyes, only the latter were rather too wanting in expression, which gave him a rather sombre look that he tried to hide by smiling frequently, looking amiable, and, in a word, by doing the agreeable, as it is called.

The handsome widow did not appear particularly delighted at his arrival, but she received him politely, as a mistress of the house who always wishes to seem pleased when anyone comes to see her; but when she found an opportunity of getting near to her brother and speaking to him without being heard by the others, she whispered into his ear :

'It really was not necessary to ask M. Lambert to come here; you know how I dislike the man, who is always showing me marked attentions. I have told him that I will never marry him, and in spite of that he is continually overwhelming me with compliments and ogling me: I cannot endure him.'

'Good heavens, Hortense! you said just the same about Gontran the first time I brought him here, and now he amuses you, and you find him very pleasant.'

'Who told you that I thought so, or what makes you think so?'

George did not give her an answer, but went and drank some more Madeira to keep M. Brochenbiche company, which latter was eagerly trying to cure his cold.

After paying his respects to the lady of the house, M. Oswald Lambert looked at the rest of the company; he smiled at M. Brochenbiche, shook hands with M. Rocaille, but when he recognised Gontran the smile forsook his lips and he merely bowed coldly to George's friend, who returned his salute equally coldly, and it was easy to see immediately that those two gentlemen were not very fond of each other. Gontran was a general favourite on account of his natural cheerfulness, whilst M. Lambert's was forced, and neither carried you away nor made you join in it. Besides that, Gontran's good fortune in love affairs was often mentioned, and though Lambert also set up for being a favourite with ladies, he was altogether distanced by Gontran; but, above all, he was much in love with Madame Dartinelle, and hoped that his perseverance would triumph over her coldness, so that when he found George's friend installed in the fair widow's country house, something immediately seemed to tell him that he had a rival.

'Which way are we going?' the new-comer asked.

'I really don't know; you must ask M. Brochen-

biche, who never comes home empty-handed,' George replied; 'he will show us.'

'I am quite willing, gentlemen; and if I am vigorous enough I will take you as far as Sceaux, for there are plenty of partridges there.'

'I beg to differ with you,' Rocaille said; 'if we want game we must go into the woods at Vèrnières.'

'I think we had better go to the open country towards Chatenay.'

'Gentlemen,' Gontran suggested, 'I propose that each of us goes where he sees fit, and so much the better for him who makes a lucky choice.'

'Gontran is right,' George exclaimed; 'we need not all keep together. Let us be off, gentlemen.'

'Madame will not come with us?' M. Lambert asked, throwing an ardent look at Hortense.

'No, sir; I am not given to field sports. I leave that sort of thing to ladies who smoke.'

'You are quite right, madame; be true to your sex, for a gun frightens the Graces.'

'Come along, Oswald; we shall get nothing if we wait much longer.'

'I am coming.'

They at length started, and it was not long before M. Rocaille was left behind, because Moufflard refused to go shooting with his master, who was obliged to keep continually pulling at the leash to get him along, besides stopping now and then to bestow a good kick on him.

CHAPTER III.

THE WIND.

THE sportsmen soon separated, some to the right, others to the left. It was tolerably fine, but there

was a very strong wind, which occasionally blew so violently as to break off large branches of trees, and to carry off hats unless they were tied on or pulled well on to the head.

Gontran, who had not expected this whirlwind, had already twice been obliged to run after his cap, which had been whisked off, and thus he kept M. Rocaille company, who had to run after his dog as soon as he had let him go, for Mauflard did not evince the smallest disposition to follow his master, and kept trying to run off, which put the latter into a very bad temper and caused him to swear at his dog, while Gontran only laughed at the tricks the wind was playing with him.

'Tie your cap on,' Rocaille shouted out to him, 'or you will be able to do nothing but to run after it.'

'Tie up your dog, else you will spend your whole day in trying to catch Moufflard.'

'If I tie him up he will not come to point when there is any game.'

'I have no strap to my cap, so I cannot fasten it under my chin.'

'Curse the wind ! It quite stuns one and prevents one from hearing the game.'

'I certainly do not hear any hares running about, but I don't think there are many of them here.'

'All the others have disappeared ; but I do not expect they will be much more lucky than we are.'

'But at any rate they have good dogs, and their caps are not being continually blown off.'

'Upon my word,' Rocaille said, 'if I were obliged to tie up my head like Brochenbiche to avoid catching cold, I should prefer having my cough.'

'You are vain, M. Rocaille.'

'Without being vain there is no need to make a sight of oneself, especially when there are pretty women about.'

'You are quite right; there is your wife, who is very pretty.'

'Oh, she does not count.'

'If not with you, you will allow her to count with others; she quite deserves to have attentions paid her.'

'You are quite welcome to do so, for I am not at all jealous. But it would be a grand thing to subdue Madame Dartinelle's coldness. Do you not intend to try to do so? you who are so well known for your successes amongst the fair sex.'

'I? Why, I have never thought of such a thing, for she always puts on such a severe look when one pays her any compliments, that it is not very encouraging. She certainly is very charming, and when she deigns to smile her face is positively delightful; but then she only smiles at indifferent topics, and I do not think it is possible to interest her, and that is a pity. Hullo! there's a rabbit out there.'

'I see him.'

'Then why don't you shoot?'

M. Rocuille shoots, misses, and exclaims: 'I think it was a hare.'

'And that's the reason that you missed, I suppose?'

'That's nonsense; but where is your dog?'

'I did not bring one, as I depended on my friends.'

'How like a Parisian, to go out shooting without a dog!'

'I see that I made a great mistake to reckon on yours.'

The report of the gun had so terrified Moufflard that he bolted as fast as he could, his master after him. The two men happened just then to be on a large tract of level ground, with a few walnut trees here and there, whose branches creaked in the wind, and blew down the walnuts which still remained on them. A young peasant girl was under one of the trees busy picking up the nuts, when suddenly a

violent puff of wind blew under her clothes and threw them over her head, thus exposing a certain part of her which was unprotected by knickerbockers. The girl tried to disembarass herself from her petticoats, but she was doubtless hindered by the walnuts which she had got in her apron, for she could not succeed in adjusting them.

Gontran, who was only about twenty yards from her, saw what the wind had done, and could not help laughing; but, in spite of the pleasure he experienced, when he thought of how annoyed the young woman must be, he ran up to her, and pulling down her petticoats let her face appear.

And it was a face worth looking at. It was a pretty, fresh face, with a rather high colour perhaps, but bright and mischievous. Black eyes which sparkled like diamonds, a little snub nose, a pretty, rather full mouth, showing perfectly white teeth: in fact, she was a very pretty little girl whom the wind had just treated so cavalierly.

She thanked Gontran, with a blush, for having rescued her from her awkward position, and said:

‘I am sure I am very much obliged to you, sir; it was very kind of you to pull my clothes down.’

‘But, my dear, child, I only did what I ought; you were in an unpleasant fix and could not see, and so I helped you as quickly as I could.’

‘Why, of course, that was the first thing to do; but if any of the village lads—who are so fond of playing us stupid tricks—had come along, they certainly would have been in no hurry to assist me.’

‘I assure you that I, too, was in no hurry to render you assistance; you were quite a picture.’

‘Please, sir, don’t talk like that. Just fancy if Fouillaupot—who is already so jealous—knew what has taken place! What a face he would make!’

‘Who is he? Your sweetheart?’

‘He is more than that, he is my intended, and we are going to get married in a week.’

‘Well, all I can say is that he is a very happy mortal, and, after my experience of to-day, I cannot help envying his good fortune.’

‘Do be quiet, you make me feel quite ashamed. Good day, sir, and thank you; I shall not go picking up walnuts again in such a wind.’

The girl went off, and Gontran looked after her and said to himself: ‘Upon my word she is a very nice, jolly little thing, and her husband need only——’

But he did not finish, for whilst he had been talking to the village girl he had heard Rocaille shouting: ‘Wait for me; I would rather see that than a hare.’

Whilst running after Moufflard, who had taken him some distance from his companion, he had, nevertheless, seen the awkward position of the girl, and so he had left his dog in order to hasten towards the walnut tree, but all in vain, for the girl had gone before he got there.

‘By Jove! what bad luck I have,’ Rocaille said; ‘but, my dear M. Gontran, why were you in such a hurry to put the girl to rights? I saw all from the distance and called out to you to wait for me; but there, you would not listen, and put everything straight before I came up.’

‘Why, M. Rocaille, you did not think that I should really allow the poor child to struggle under her petticoats and not relieve her?’

‘Where would have been the harm? It is the sort of thing that happens every day in Paris, when it is a stormy wind and women are crossing the bridges. Puff! up go their petticoats into the air.’

‘Yes, but in Paris nearly all the ladies wear knickerbockers.’

‘Oh! not all. But you saw the girl; is she pretty?’

‘She is very nice; with a mischievous look and pleasant smile.’

‘I think everything about her is nice. It is that brute Moufflard’s fault that I was not near the walnut tree; I am dreadfully sorry for it. Where is that confounded dog? If I catch him I will tie him up and not let him go again.’

M. Rocaille ran off to try to catch the dog, and Gontran went in another direction, saying to himself: ‘That fellow is getting a nuisance, and I certainly do not mean to waste my time in running after his dog with him. I certainly have not got one, but for all the game I see, I think it would be an unnecessary luxury;’ and, very likely without thinking what he was doing, the young man went in the direction which the girl had taken, for there is something like a magnet which attracts men to pretty women. You may say that it is the effect of magnetism, of spiritualism, or fanaticism, but I think it is merely the effect of naturalism.

Gontran went on at haphazard, without thinking that he was supposed to be out shooting, but dreaming of *the handsome widow* whose guest he was, for, though he pretended not to care much about her when Rocaille spoke to him, he was far from being insensible to her attractions. He would be too happy to gain Hortense’s love, but he knew enough about women to feel sure that he must not act as he would under ordinary circumstances towards a strict and serious, though beautiful, woman, who does not regard love in a light manner, and in whose eyes his reputation has already injured him; in fact, he hopes to make the lady think more about him by pretending not to think of her. A woman who is in the habit of receiving the homage of nearly all men, will much more easily remark the man who does not pay her any attention than all those who strive to please her.

The means which Gontran employed were not at

all bad, and that was why he never spoke to Hortense of love. He could not, however, always prevent himself from looking at her anything but indifferently, for no one is always master of his feelings, and at such times she would look at him as though she expected something further from him, but he would resume his cheerful and easy manners, and the lady would bite her lips with vexation.

Meanwhile the wind, which had gone down for a moment, suddenly grew as violent as ever again, and Gontran, absorbed in his thoughts, all at once found that he had lost his headgear, for the wind had carried off his cap so suddenly that he had not even seen it go. He put his hand to his head, looked up into the air and then all about him, but no signs of his cap! The wind, however, was still blowing violently, so he went on at a venture, saying to himself: 'it is very unpleasant, for I shall catch a cold in my head. If I had only seen it fly away, I should know in what direction to look for it. I don't care about catching cold, but I shall look such a fool to go home from shooting bareheaded, and everybody will make fun of me, especially that Oswald Lambert, whom I cannot bear, and who is continually looking at George's sister. If I were to meet a peasant I would buy his hat of him. A king once exclaimed, "My kingdom for a horse!" I would willingly say, "My purse for a hat!" I have had enough of shooting, and I don't even know where I am, or what road to take to get to Madame Dartinelle's, and perhaps I am going further and further away. I have never been about here before.. It is a ridiculous position to be in, and the wind is enough to blow one's head off.'

Gontran walked on, looking on the ground in the hope of seeing his cap, which might have been carried to some distance, when suddenly the girl who had been picking up the walnuts a few minutes before

placed herself before him, holding in her hand a shooting cap, which she gave him with a smile.

‘I expect this belongs to you, sir; I found it over yonder, close to Claude’s field.’

‘Yes, that’s my head covering, and for you to bring it to me are two strokes of good luck at once.’

‘You were civil to me just now, and I am glad to be able to return it.’

‘You are very kind, and I am inclined to thank the wind, whose tricks always turn out to my profit.’

‘But if you do not tie your cap on you will lose it again, and I may not always be on the spot to find it.’

‘How am I to fasten it on? The strap is gone, there is a buttonhole and a buckle, but I have neither string nor ribbon to fasten it on.’

‘Have not you got a bit of string?’

‘I told you I had not.’

She thought for a moment, and said: ‘Wait an instant, I will give you something to tie it on; turn your back and don’t look.’

Gontran did as he was told, and the girl pulled up her petticoats, quickly undid one of her garters, which was fastened above the knee, and said:

‘Here you are, give me your cap and I will put a strap on.’

Gontran gave it to her, and looked at what she was fastening on.

‘What have you got there? It has a buckle; where did you get it?’

‘Off my knee, of course.’

‘Do you mean to say that it is one of your garters?’

‘Yes, and it will do beautifully.’

‘But you are too kind to rob yourself of your garters for me.’

‘I am going to get married, and Fouillaupot will

give me another pair; he gave me these not very long ago, and they are tolerably new still.'

'Your garter! Do you know that it is a very precious gift? I am really fortunate, and shall always keep it.'

'Be quiet, and don't talk such nonsense.'

'What's your name?'

'What has that to do with you?'

'I should like to know the name of the girl whose garter I have got.'

'Well, there is no mystery about it, if you want to know it. My name is Félicité Boulafour; I am a clear starcher, live at Fontenay-aux-Roses, and in a week I am going to marry Cadet Fouillaupot, a laundryman, whose master is going to give up his business to him. There, is that quite enough for you?'

'Quite, thank you; you are very kind. So you are going to unite clear-starching with ordinary laundry work.'

'Yes, it is the best thing to do.'

'Why, you almost sighed as you said that. I fancy that you are not very much in love with your intended?'

'In love with him? Not at all! Cadet is a very good fellow and a capital workman, but I am not the least in love with him.'

'Then why are you going to marry him? A pretty girl like you ought to love her husband.'

'My mother says it is not at all necessary, for she did not all care for her husband when she married him, and yet they were very happy. I don't dislike him, and though he is rather stupid, my mother says that a stupid husband is better than a very sensible one; still, he is too jealous, and that I do not like at all. I told him so, and said: "Cadet, don't quarrel with me and have a scene because I joke with anybody, for if you do I shall only do it all the more,"

and then he swore that he would alter, and marry me with his eyes shut.'

'I think he had better keep them wide open to look at you.'

'But I am chatting to you as if I had known you a long time, and now I must go and see my cousin Giroux. Good-bye, sir.'

'Good-bye, pretty Félicité.'

'You have remembered my name?'

'I shall remember something else when I think of you! Oh, will you tell me my way to Fontenay?'

'There it is, along that path, and keep always to the right.'

'If you are going back there, I can go with you.'

'No, I must go as far as Sceaux to my cousin's; and, besides, if anybody saw me returning to the village with a fine gentleman, what a talk it would cause! Good-bye, sir.'

'Perhaps I may meet you again by chance; meanwhile, I will never part with your garter.'

'What nonsense you do talk!

'Will you give me a kiss?'

'I should like to see myself!'

'Just to thank you for the present you made me.'

'It is not worth while.'

'Just one little kiss?'

'No, I dare not trust you; another time, perhaps.'

'Will you promise?'

'Yes. I am running no risk in giving you the promise, for I shall never see you again.'

'How do you know?'

'Good-bye, sir.'

The girl then ran off, and Gontran went on his way towards Fontenay-aux-Roses.

CHAPTER IV.

RETURN OF THE SPORTSMEN.

WHEN Gontran got back to Madame Dartinelle's he found that M. Oswald Lambert had already returned, for he did not care about shooting, though he had eagerly accepted George's invitation, as it gave him an opportunity of seeing his sister. He had, therefore, left his fellow sportsman as soon as he could, hoping to have a *tete-a-tete* with Hortense, and was very much disappointed at finding three ladies instead of one, for Madame Rocaille and Madame Brochenbiche were already there, well dressed, and with their hair very carefully done, ready to criticise all the ladies of the neighbourhood. As soon as they saw M. Lambert, who had all the graces and manners of a Paris dandy, and whom they had not met at Madame Dartinelle's before, the two neighbours hastily looked at their toilettes to assure themselves that they were quite correct, and assumed a very gracious look,

'What, have you come back from shooting so soon, M. Lambert?' Hortense asked, as she received him with a slightly ironical smile. 'I suppose you have killed enough game and want to leave some for the others?'

Oswald bore her attack boldly, and, bowing with a contrite look, he answered:

'Alas, Madame, I have brought nothing home. I have seen nothing and shot nothing, and so I said to myself: "Instead of going after game which cannot be found, I shall pass my time much more pleasantly in Madame Dartinelle's society." I am glad that I have been so unfortunate in my sport, as it has given

me an opportunity of joining this delightful company all the sooner.'

This compliment pleased Madame Rocaille very much, and she turned up her eyes and pursed up her mouth, and Rosina Brochenbiche, who was always laughing, cried :

'So you have come back empty-handed ! If my husband were not to bring any game home, he would nearly get the jaundice. But I don't bother myself, for he would rather kill all the cats in the neighbourhood than come back with an empty game-bag.'

Oswald had scarcely finished paying his pretty compliments when Gontran appeared before the trio of ladies. 'Another *nought*, I will bet,' Madame Brochenbiche exclaimed.

'You would win your bet, madame, for I have come back just as I set out ; but really the wind is so deafening that one can hardly stand against it.'

'I hope to goodness it will not blow our husbands away !'

'I am quite easy on that score, for M. Rocaille is far too heavy.'

'So you have not been more fortunate than M. Lambert, monsieur ?' Hortense asked.

'If he has come back empty, that is precisely my case.'

'Luckily we did not depend altogether upon your shooting for dinner.'

'Wait a little, madame,' Rosina said ; 'all the gentlemen have not come back yet, and one can always rely upon my husband for an animal of some sort or other.'

'I will not be answerable for mine,' Léocadie said, 'for his gun very often misses fire ; and when I say to him, "My dear, why do you keep a gun that misses fire ?" he says that he is used to it.'

'Where are your companions, gentlemen ; have they been more fortunate than you ?'

RETURN OF THE SPORTSMEN.

‘I really do not know, madame, for I left M. Rocaille running after his dog, who has not the slightest taste for sport.’

‘When I saw that the other gentlemen were prepared to go a long way, for they talked of the woods of Verniers and of La Croix-de-Berny, I felt that I had not sufficient courage to go all that distance with them.’

‘You certainly are not very enthusiastic sportsmen, gentlemen, though this is not a day to give anyone much inclination to go out shooting.’

‘I beg your pardon, madame,’ Gontram exclaimed, ‘for I have had a most delightful day, and I assure you I shall always remember it with great pleasure.’

‘You must have found our neighbourhood very pretty, sir.’

‘It is very pretty, but I knew it already; whereas to-day I have seen something that I never saw before.’

‘Have you discovered any fresh spot from which to see the landscape?’ said Madame Brochenbiche. ‘Where is it? do tell me where it is, for I want to see it, I am most curious!’

‘Madame, I do not think you will see it as I did, and, besides, I do not suppose that it would afford you the same pleasure.’

‘Monsieur Dalby says this in such a strange manner that one might fancy there is some mystery in it all,’ Hortense said.

‘You are quite right, madame; for what I have been saying relates to a very charming adventure which happened to me whilst I was trying to get some shooting.’

‘An adventure! oh, do tell it us, for I am so fond of hearing adventures.’

‘Well, really, ladies, it is rather a difficult matter to tell to you, for it is rather——’

‘If it is one that ladies ought not to hear,’ Hor-

tense said, drawing in her lips, 'please do not tell it us, Monsieur.'

'Yes, do! do!' the other two ladies cried. 'We are not girls, Madame Dartinelle is a widow, so we can very well listen to anything *rather difficult*. In the country people are not so particular.'

'Well, as these ladies wish it, you can tell it.'

Gontran was just going to begin when the other sportsmen returned. M. Brochenbiche has shot two partridges, and George three sparrows. Rocaille is the last to arrive, and proudly he pulls a hare out of his game bag, which he lays at Madame Dartinelle's feet, at which all the others utter an exclamation of astonishment.

'A hare! he has killed a hare!'

'It is incredible,' Brochenbiche said; 'I could have sworn that there were none about here.'

'My husband has never had a better day's sport,' Madame Rocaille declared.

'You see, madame, I wished to distinguish myself,' her husband said, swaggering about in front of his game.

But very soon the hare distributed such a strong smell through the whole drawing-room that every lady was obliged to take out her pocket-handkerchief.

'Good heavens!' M. Léocadie exclaimed, 'whatever smells so horribly?'

'I think it is M. Rocaille's hare,' Hortense murmured.

'O Lord!' Gontran says, 'is it as high as that already? That fellow must have been very ill!'

'Come now, Rocaille,' fat George said, 'just confess that the hare was already dead when you shot it.'

'Nothing of the sort, quite impossible; it was merely asleep on its form when I saw it——'

'And did not wake up when you fired! I can

quite believe it, and that you had no need to be in a hurry.'

'How like men! they are jealous because they have brought nothing back, and they will not allow that I have killed a hare.'

'My dear Rocaille, newly-killed game does not smell quite so strongly as this, and to punish you, you shall eat some of it at dinner. Here, take away this gentleman's hare, and don't let us see it any more.'

'Don't let us smell it any more,' Brochenbiche said, 'for it is very unhealthy to inhale this smell. Rosina, have you any eau-de-cologne about you?'

'Yes, plenty.'

'Then just rub my temples, for there is no time to lose; I was feeling poisoned up to my very eyes.'

The servant carried the hare away, and to avenge himself for what had been said about it, Rocaille went on, rubbing his hands:

'Ha, ha! These gentlemen do not like the idea of my having had good sport, but if they only knew what M. Gontran and I have seen, they would regret more than ever not having been with us!'

'What did you see that was so wonderful, gentlemen?'

'Oh, only a bird that is rather rare about here.'

'What bird was it?'

'The *cul-blanc* (the wheatear, a delicious little bird, found on the Sussex Downs, esteemed a great delicacy, something like an ortolan. The French name signifies *white rump*), and we really saw one!'

'M. Rocaille,' Hortense said, 'I think you are forgetting yourself.'

'My dear sister,' George replied, 'you have no reason to be angry, but I suppose you do not know that there is a bird that goes by that name, and a very fat and good bird it is.'

'I had no idea that there was any bird of that name,' she said, 'had you, ladies?'

'My husband has often mentioned them to me,' Léocadie answered, 'but I was mistaking one thing for the other.'

'Well, Rocaille, finish your story; you saw one of these birds and did not shoot at it?'

He began to laugh furiously, and murmured:

'Nothing I should have liked better, but I was too far off; ask M. Dalby, who was quite close and could see much better than I did.'

'Ladies,' Gontran said, 'you remember that I was just going to tell you what had happened to me this morning when these gentlemen returned, and M. Rocaille is alluding to that, so I will try to tell you what it was without shocking your ears in the least. When we started to go shooting this morning there was a tremendous wind——'

'Yes, it hindered me very much in coming here,' Léocadie observed.

'We were in the level country, with a few old walnut trees scattered about. M. Rocaille was very busy trying to catch his dog, who refused to follow us, when suddenly I saw just in front of me a young girl, who was engaged in picking up the walnuts, and whom the wind had played a most perfidious trick, for it had got under her petticoats and blown them so as to hide her head entirely, whilst another part of her person was—well, was quite exposed to the air.'

'Ah! very good,' said George; 'you mean the name of the bird that was mentioned just now.'

'Exactly so. You may be sure that I ran immediately to the girl's assistance, and put things into their place again; just then M. Rocaille came up, and found fault with me for having been in too great a hurry to hide what the wind had uncovered.'

'You libertine!' you shocking man!' Léocadie cried; 'it is just like you to profit by an accident which had happened to the poor girl.'

'Really, monsieur, it was too bad!'

'Good gracious, ladies! why, we go nearly every day to see statues, which are often full length naked figures, and that is much worse.'

'Those are works of art, and it is not at all the same thing.'

'But, M. Dalby, you must have seen her; was she pretty?'

'She was very nice, a mischievous, striking face, good eyes——'

'Why, here is Gontran in love with a little village girl; what a pity the adventure finished so quickly!'

'But it did not end there, it had a sequel.'

'Oh, there was a sequel to it; let us hear it, please.'

'What! there was something more, and I was not there,' Rocaille exclaimed.

Hortense, who appeared to take a great interest in the end of this adventure, looked steadily at Gontran and said:

'I am glad to find, monsieur, that you have told us what happened, in a very proper manner, far more so than M. Rocaille began to relate it, and I hope that this will also be the case with the sequel.'

'Indeed, madame, there is nothing in it to offend even the chastest ears. I had left M. Rocaille, whom his dog was taking farther and farther away from me, and I was walking without any definite aim, whilst the wind continued to blow just as violently as before. Suddenly, I felt that my head was very cold, and found that a violent puff of wind had carried off my cap.'

'It was not fastened on?'

'No, I had lost the strap, and it happened so

suddenly that I had not even seen which way it went. I looked in all directions, on the ground, in the clover, but could find nothing. After hunting about in vain for a long time, I made up my mind to go on, when a girl came in front of me and gave me, with a smile, the very thing I was looking for. You may guess my surprise, for it was the same girl to whom I had, just a few minutes previously, done a slight service.

‘Was it really,’ Rocaille asked, ‘the young woman, whose petticoats the wind——’

‘The very same.’ I thanked her, and put my cap on my head again, but she saw that it had no strap, and said to me: “It will be blown away again; you had better tie it on with a bit of string or something.” That was very easily said, but I had nothing to tie it with, and then—this is the most amusing part of the adventure—she turned her back to me, took off one of her garters, and used it to make a strap for my cap!’

‘Surely not!’

‘Just look, ladies and gentlemen, you can see.’

Gontran took his cap, which he had put upon a table on coming in, and showed to those who were present, who examined the garter with much curiosity.

‘Well, ladies, did I speak the truth?’

‘No; it is certainly a woman’s garter, not a very splendid affair, but good enough for a villager. A little Cupid, and the motto: *No further*.’

‘They often say that,’ Rocaille observed; ‘but it is only a matter of form.’

‘It is really very charming of the little peasant,’ George said. ‘It seems that Gontran has made a conquest.’

‘Not that; she was only grateful and glad to do me a service, and you may suppose that I duly thanked her.’

‘And what next? for I suppose that there was a further sequel,’ Oswald said, in a mocking manner. ‘When a girl takes off her garter, that is as much as to encourage you to ask for something else.’

‘You are mistaken, sir,’ Gontran replied coldly; ‘there is nothing more; the adventure ends there.’

‘That’s a pity,’ George replied; ‘I should have carried the matter further.’

‘Perhaps M. Dalby has not told us everything,’ murmured Hortense, who was examining the garter very closely.

‘Well, never mind,’ Oswald exclaimed; ‘this certainly is a very privileged part of the country; roses in all directions, and girls who take off their garters as a present for you. I shall certainly buy a villa at Fontenay-aux-Roses.’

‘It is a delightful part of the country,’ George observed. ‘The Abbot *Chaulien*, that amiable poet, who reminds us of Horace and Tibullus, was born at Fontenay-aux-Roses, and *Scarron*, the buffoon *Scarron*, seized whilst still quite young by an incurable disease, owned a pretty house in this village, and the charms of his intellect attracted the best people of the town and court hither.’

‘But why is it called *aux-Roses*?’ Léocadie asked. ‘My husband could never explain that to me.’

‘Yes, I have! It is very simple. I told you that this village is called Fontenay-aux-Roses because roses are so abundantly grown here.’

‘This place,’ George interrupted him, ‘was formerly called Fontenay-aux-Baigneux, probably because it was so close to the latter village. But it seems that for a very long time the inhabitants have devoted themselves to the culture of roses, for we can read in the Acts of Parliament that the makers of the wreaths and bouquets of roses for that Court provided themselves with roses here. It was an ancient custom, and in early ages dukes and peers

were obliged, every year on days of ceremony, to wear roses in Parliament, and the king himself paid tribute of roses to that Supreme Court.'

'Roses are very delightful,' Brochenbiche said, 'but they give one the headache, and their scent affects the nerves, so that I have them all removed from my garden.'

'Do you really mean to say that you have done that?'

'Madame, I have put sorrel in their place, and it is far more wholesome, more useful, and does not affect the head.'

'Yes, said Rosina, laughing, 'my husband has made a large bed of sorrel and spinach; just try and make a nosegay out of that! I have told him that now all he need do would be to sow flax.'

Here dinner was announced, and everybody went into the dining room. Oswald was the first to offer his arm to *the handsome widow*, who could not refuse it, but she gave Gontran a look of vexation, whilst he pretended to be closely examining the strange strap to his cap.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF A DINNER.

THEY all took their seats; Hortense had placed Gontran and M. Brochenbiche on either side of her; whilst George sat between the two married ladies, and Lambert seemed annoyed at not having a place beside the mistress of the house as well as Gontran, so after the soup he said, by way of retaliation: 'I think I already smell M. Rocaille's hare coming.'

'No, my dear fellow, you are quite mistaken,'

George replied; 'you will not taste that hare, for the cook told me she should not venture to dress it.'

'Your cook is a fool,' Rocaille exclaimed. 'The hare would have been delicious.'

'Well, I fancy it would have been almost too tender.'

'What has become of it?'

'Don't alarm yourself; you will find it at your own house.'

'Good heavens!' Léocadia exclaimed; 'I only hope Jeannette will not put it anywhere near my room!'

'As for me,' Rocaille said, 'I am not like our neighbour, Gateau, for I like to eat the game that I have shot, and to offer some of it to my friends.'

'Who is this M. Gateau of whom you are constantly talking?'

'A queer sort of individual, who has made a lot of money in business.'

'What sort of business?'

'I really do not know exactly, but he invented a soap.'

'To make negroes white?'

'No, to dye the hair. But that has nothing to do with it; he has grown rich, and that is all very well, but since he has become rich he has a mania for inviting you to a luncheon.'

'A good sort of mania, if he gives you a good one.'

'But he does not for he gives you a very bad one; in fact one might almost say that he gives you nothing at all. Just ask my wife what sort of a dinner we had at his house when at last I consented to go, as he was continually bothering me with his invitations.'

'My dear, please tell the story yourself; I think it will amuse the company.'

‘I know that it did not amuse me in the least.’

‘Go on, Rocaille; tell us all about your dinner at Gateau’s. He is said to be a very good shot.’

‘So he is; he always brings home a lot of game, and it was that which induced me to accept his pressing invitation. As I am very fond of game, I said to myself: “He will give us a treat.” The wretch! but listen to what I am going to tell you. We were to go and dine at this neighbour’s, who has a great deal of property about here and elsewhere. I do not see much of him, as I am not much given to pay calls, although we have not always been on very friendly terms. He is a young man still, with a young and very pleasant wife, two small children, and, I think, some sisters and other relations, but that is neither here nor there. He does a very large business, and makes a great deal of money, for which I certainly do not blame him, and he has just lately built a very beautiful new house near here—nothing but mouldings, sculpture, and wainscots. On going into the drawing rooms you might fancy yourself in the palace at Versailles, only they are more cheerful.

‘When a man has such a fine house, one may naturally expect a good dinner also; it was the shooting season, my neighbour is a great sportsman, I am very fond of game—there. I had a whole heap of reasons for accepting this oft-repeated invitation to dinner, and the day and the hour were fixed; so far, good.

‘On the appointed day they sent me word at eleven o’clock in the morning that I was expected to dinner at twelve, punctually. I told the messenger that I was not in the habit of dining at mid-day like our ancestors had done, and that I had been asked for six o’clock; that if now my neighbour wished me to go to lunch instead of to dinner that would not suit me at all, as lunch upset the

whole day, and so it was no good for them to expect me at twelve o'clock, for I should not go. With that answer the messenger went off.

'Three-quarters of an hour later he returned, and told me that they would expect us to dinner at six precisely. That was all right, but they need not have sent anybody to tell me, as the matter had been settled beforehand, though I believe my neighbour hoped that I should accept his invitation to lunch; but, if so, why the devil did he keep asking me to dinner?

'I was as punctual as a clock, for I never miss an appointment nor keep any one waiting for me, though I find that very few other people possess that virtue; but excuse me for paying myself that compliment by the way, for it is not my habit to do so. My wife and I, therefore, arrived at a few minutes to six o'clock, expecting to meet a few of our neighbours there. In the garden and in the entrance hall we met nothing but a dog, who barked at us as if he took us for thieves, and was commissioned to prevent us from entering. However, we braved his menaces, and at last two little boys appeared and came and hugged us, as if they already adored us, but then, children are much given to hugging and kissing! They were nice children, one four the other eight years old, and, as is often the case, the youngest seemed to be the master. After kissing the children I looked all about, for I did not suppose that we were going to dine with them only; however, a servant came through, but she seemed very busy, and did not stop. Next, another young woman came in, who was kind enough to tell us that her mistress would come directly, as she was finishing dressing, and then she disappeared also. Everybody seemed in a hurry in that house. At last I heard our neighbour's voice; he came in with another gentleman, whom I took for a guest like ourselves, but it was only some one on

business, and my neighbour took him into his study and called out to me: "You are very kind to have come; I will be with you in a moment, so sit down without waiting for me;" and then he also disappeared.

'My wife and I were certainly not going to sit down to table with only two little boys, and his words, "You are very kind to have come," struck us as rather strange; perhaps he thought that we really should not come. However, the children, who were no doubt hungry, took us into the dining-room, where the table was already laid. I saw, with some surprise, that the dessert was put on the table, which was very elegantly laid out between the *hors d'œuvre* and the decanters, and that it consisted of grapes, pears, cheese and biscuits, which must already have figured at more than one previous repast. I know that sometimes at lunch everything is put on the table at the same time, but it is not usual at dinner to put the dessert on the table till the sweets are served, and it is only allowable for the keeper of a restaurant to cover his table with epergnes that take up a large amount of room, and only serve as decorations. Certainly our neighbour intended this for a luncheon, but that did not matter to me, so long as it was good.

'At last madame appeared. She was very pleasant, and received us very kindly, made her excuses for not having been ready, and then said: "Let us make haste and sit down."

"But your husband?"

"Oh! he will come directly; he has to get rid of a customer. One never has any peace here; never a moment to oneself; but Arthur will soon dispose of him."

"But surely we must wait for your husband?"

"No, no; we must have dinner."

'Fortunately Arthur came in, having got rid of his customer, and said to us:

“Why have you not sat down yet?”

“We were waiting for you.”

“Oh! we never stand on ceremony here. My dear, show M. and Madame Rocaille where to sit.”

“That is very easily done.”

Whereupon he made me sit between the two little boys, and sat down between my wife and his own. There were two other places for her sister and another young person. It certainly was very easily done, but very badly for all that. When you ask a gentleman to dinner, he is generally placed next to the lady of the house, and not between two children; but he wished to keep his wife by his side. If I were a young man it would be rather flattering to my vanity, but as I am not, it seemed to me to be very ridiculous; but perhaps they thought that I was fond of children, and so gave me a dose of them.

The sister came in and took her seat, and he called out: “Where is Célestine?” Why doesn’t she appear? Does she mean to keep us waiting?”

“She will be here directly; let us have dinner.”

That was decidedly my opinion, for I began to be very hungry; but the soup was not on the table yet, and our neighbour exclaimed: “Do go and see what Célestine is doing. This is too absurd. If she doesn’t come we shall soon dine without her.”

His sister got up and left the room, and it appeared to me that we were like omnibuses; that we found some difficulty in getting full.

“Is the lady one of your friends, who is staying with you here in the country?”

“Célestine? Oh, dear no; she is a seamstress who comes and works by the day, and mends and does up my wife’s dresses.”

“I really thought it was hardly necessary to wait for her, especially as the housemaid had just brought in the soup.” I hoped that my *Amphitryon*

was going to help it, but he only took up the soup ladle and worked it up and down in his hands like a drum-major's staff, and still kept looking at the door.

'I looked at my wife, who looked at the way the soup ladle was being manipulated; our hostess looked into her plate, the youngest child looked at the soup, and the other looked at the dog, and we all looked as if we were sitting for a picture; but we got no dinner. Luckily, the soup-ladle, being jerked up too high, fell down on a glass, which it broke. I say *luckily*, for I verily believe that if that had not happened, he would be working it up and down still.

"If you had helped the soup that would not have happened," his wife said.

"You are quite right, but I was waiting for your sister. Why does she not come back? Do go and see what she is about."

'His wife got up from the table and disappeared.

"By Jove," I said to myself, "do they intend to spend all their time playing at hide and seek, appearing and disappearing like Chinese shadows? I wonder what will be the end of it?"

'Just then the youngest child called out: "Papa, I want some soup. Are we not going to have any dinner to-day?"

"You are quite right; I beg your pardon; I don't know what I was thinking about, and now neither my wife nor her sister have come back. Whatever can they be doing?"

'Here Arthur got up, and I thought he was going to look for them also, and if he had done that I had made up my mind for a grand blow. I was determined to give my wife my arm, and to go away and dine at home. But at length his wife returned, as did her sister a moment later, for which I thanked heaven, as we were full at last!

‘The soup was helped, but it had bread in it, and I never did like soup with bread in it. I dare say you will think me too particular, but there are so many sorts of pastes which can be used, that I did not see why I should stuff myself with bread at the beginning of dinner; that, however, is a minor matter. Everyone to his own taste, and I suppose my neighbours are fond of bread, but in soups of that kind I am always afraid of getting bits of stale bread, all the old dry crusts which have been put on one side for that purpose, for careful people waste nothing.

‘After the soup I naturally thought that we should get something to drink, but nobody seemed to think of that; the sister, however, got up and went away.

‘“Now you shall have something delicious,” said my host, rubbing his hands with an air of great satisfaction.

‘“I am sure of that,” I replied, looking at the two bottles which were on the table, and which nobody seemed to think of uncorking, and as I thought that was rather too much, and having no reason for being shy, I continued:

‘“But before eating anything *delicious*, I can assure you that I should very much like to have a drink of something *tolerable*. Are you in the habit of dining without drinking anything, like so many camels?”

‘“What! haven’t you had wine yet? I really beg your pardon; it was quite an oversight. Where is the servant to uncork the bottles?”

‘“If we had a corkscrew here we could easily draw the corks ourselves.”

‘“There is not one here. Célestine, go and ask the maid for the corkscrew.”

‘Célestine went after the corkscrew, whilst I asked myself whether they had, on purpose, put the bottles on the table so hermetically corked.

that it was quite impossible to get the corks out with the hands alone.

'They offered us butter and radishes, which I refused, saying that I could eat nothing until I had drank something, and Arthur rubbed his hands again, saying:

"I am going to give you something delicious, and you will never guess what it is."

"Well, I suppose you are going to give us some of your game, for only two days ago you said to me: 'I have just killed seventeen head—six hares, four brace and a half of partridges, and a couple of landrails.'"

"No; it is not that. I am not going to give you any of my game, for my wife gave away the partridges, and the hare that we had remaining was too high; it was not fit to eat!"

'No game; and I had only accepted his invitation on that account! What a lesson for me! And then the corkscrew did not come, and I began to get in a rage. There was some mystery in all this that I did not try to penetrate, but either my neighbour was a terrible liar and never brought anything back when he went out shooting, or else he sold his game, and had not thought fit to keep any for one, but then—why the devil did he ask one to dinner?

'When her sister came back his wife asked where the corkscrew was.

"What do you want? I don't know anything about the corkscrew."

"But we want one to uncork the bottles."

"I have heard nothing about it."

"Have you not seen Célestine?"

"No; why should I have seen her?"

"She was told to ask for the corkscrew."

'During this dialogue my amphitryon said to me:

"I have all the finest Spanish wines: Alicante,

Malaga, Rota Tent. I got some small casks of them, and you shall taste them."

"Just now, I would rather try your *vin ordinaire*."

"Ah! here is Célestine at last. Where is the corkscrew?"

"Célestine, however, came in perfectly calm, and said: "The housemaid does not know where she has put it."

"At this my patience was exhausted, and I jumped up.

"Where are you going?" Arthur asked me.

"I am going home to get a corkscrew."

"Please stop where you are, for it must be found."

"At that moment the servant came in with the air of a conqueror, brandishing the corkscrew in her hand, and exclaiming:

"Here it is, I have found it; it was at the bottom of the sauce-pan, with the rest of the soup."

"That confirmed me in my ideas about soup with bread in it. Of course, if the corkscrew was found in the soup, it must have been thrown into it with a lot of old crusts of bread without being noticed. How things hang together, and the truth is revealed in the end! At last the bottles are drawn, and I get some wine, but I take care to seize one of the bottles and put it by the side of my plate, and I intend to defend it with my life, for it is no use standing on ceremony with people of this sort, who do not know how to live.

"I waited for the wonderful dish, which my neighbour had been vaunting so much, that was to follow the soup, with great curiosity, for I hoped to see a beautiful, fresh, well-cooked fish; but instead of that there was brought in a round tin box like those that contain sardines or preserved vegetables. It

was on a deep plate, and the whole was before our host, who poured spirits of wine into the plate and then set fire to it, so that the tin box was in the midst of the flames. What was going to happen, heaven only knew; it was very like a phantasmagoria, but not like a dinner, and the flames of the spirit of wine gave us all a bluish tint which reminded me of the nuns' scene in *Robert the Devil*. The elder of my two little neighbours began to cry, and his younger brother said to him:

"What is the matter with you, Coco?"

"I am frightened at what papa is doing."

"How silly you are; it is the same sort of thing as he did the other day. Surely you remember when mamma said: 'Oh! how nasty it is, I will never eat it again.'"

'Here my wife burst out laughing, and I did the same, so the lady of the house thought the best thing she could do would be to follow our example. Papa was the only one who kept serious, and said to to his son:

"Why, you little idiot, you don't suppose I should give M. and Madame Rocaille anything nasty to eat? The other day it was tinned lobster, and my wife is not fond of lobsters, and that is why she said it was not nice. But I will answer for your liking this, for it is mackerel, and you shall have it properly cooked and quite hot, just as if it had at that moment come out of the oven."

"As I have never seen mackerel just fresh from the oven, I do not know what it may be like; but I am surprised that at this time of the year, when it is so easy to get fresh fish, you should prefer to have it tinned."

"I will tell you how that is; I got a lot of boxes of preserved provisions from a man who owed me money, and I took them in payment, as I could not get anything else."

"And you want to get rid of them? Now I understand."

"Besides that, to-day there was no fish in the market; none to be had here."

"My dear neighbour did not exactly speak the truth, for we are too near Paris not to be able to procure anything we want in a very short time; but I can quite understand that he preferred to get rid of his tinned provision."

"Do your culinary preparations take long?" I asked him, after watching the flames for some time.

"No, seven or eight minutes—ten at the outside."

"If one should happen to be very hungry, it would not be very pleasant to have to depend on those tins for ones dinner."

"Well, one can talk while one is waiting. Take some radishes."

"Thank you, I am not very fond of them."

"They are very wholesome."

"That is very likely, and so are watercresses; but, nevertheless, I should not care to dine off nothing but radishes and watercresses."

"Nobody had got up for a long time, but now Madame Gateau disappeared, and the spirits of wine went on burning. Arthur looked at the flame with delight, and said:

"It will be delicious, and cooked to a turn!"

"I felt sure that he wanted me to take some of his tins off his hands, but it was no good, for I am not fond of preserved provisions."

"Célestine, you will go and ask the maid to bring in the bottles of Spanish wine that I brought up out of the cellar, and tell her to be sure and not to shake them."

"Célestine went out, and the sister very soon followed her example, and if only our neighbour had done the same I know that my wife and I should

have disappeared likewise ; but he kept his seat, and continued to look at the bluish flames which enveloped the tin box. One of his little boys began to eat a biscuit, and the other took a grape or two, and I was strongly inclined to do the same, and go on at once to the dessert, and I could not help saying :

“ I shall be much obliged if you will not ask me to dinner again when you have the contents of one of those tins to follow the soup.”

“ I assure you that you will be amply recompensed for the delay immediately. Ten minutes ! That is just the right time, and now I will blow out the flames. Where are the ladies ? ”

“ Perhaps they have gone to look for another corkscrew ! ”

“ Here they come.”

His wife and her sister came back and sat down, and he helped us to some of the famous fish, saying :

“ It is quite hot.”

“ By Jove, I should be astonished if it were not.”

“ Just taste it, and tell me what you think of it ? ”

It was a mackerel which had been boned and cooked in butter. It was not absolutely nasty, but it had a slight taste of lead, which I have always found in tinned provisions.

“ Well, how do you like it ? ”

“ It is not bad, but I prefer fresh fish.”

“ Let me give you some more ? ”

“ No, thank you, I had rather not ; I should like something that is not preserved food.”

Our neighbour seemed to be surprised that my wife and I would not have anything more to do with the tin, but he helped the three ladies and the two little boys abundantly, and said :

“It must not be left, for it will not be good to-morrow.”

‘I could quite believe that, as it was not good then. The servant put some small Spanish bottles on the table, which were no bigger than those in which wine merchants’ travellers carry about their samples, and he helped us to some. The Alicant was very good, but the Malaga was rather bitter, and then, one cannot drink Spanish wines at dinner, at least so I think, for they are too sweet, and too much like liqueurs; and, besides that, I prefer French wines. At last the servant put a splendid roast fowl on the table. Bravo! We are going to have something to eat that will not taste of lead. M. Gateau took the dish, which had been placed in front of him, and turned it round and round. Was he going to set fire to it as well? I was really quite in a state of trepidation, till he seized a poultry knife, and attacked one of the legs, which he cut off, and then uttered an exclamation.

“What is the matter, my dear?” his wife asked, “have you found a diamond in its inside?”

“Why, that wretched cook, she is always doing something or other stupid. This capon is not half done; it is bleeding, absolutely bleeding, and it is impossible to eat it like this; just look at that leg and that wing. Rosalie! Rosalie!”

‘The cook came in, looking quite complacent.

“What do you want, sir?”

“Did you take this capon for a beefsteak?”

“How could I do that, sir, when they are not the least alike?”

“Then why did you send it up nearly raw? Nothing is so bad as underdone poultry. Just look at that wing; it is impossible to eat it.”

“Why, sir, you told me to be sure and not roast it too much.”

“Too much! Why, of course I did; too much is bad, but raw is still worse.”

“Suppose she puts it to the fire again,” his wife suggested.

“No, that would never do now. Rosalie, you must cook it again to-morrow, *à la Marengo*; cut it into pieces, and put some superfine oil, some mushrooms, and just an idea of garlic to it. You understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Add some slices of lemon, and it will be delicious; you will remember all I have told you?”

“Certainly, sir,”

“The cook carried off the capon, of which we had had nothing but the savoury odour; but we know that it will be delicious next day, *à la Marengo*, and that is highly satisfactory.

“Our host, who I suppose wants to make up to us for our loss of the capon by his little Spanish flasks, wishes to give us some more wine, but we refuse, and I am curious to see what will come next. A dish of white haricot beans is brought in, but they are so burnt that they look like red haricots, white as they naturally are. Perhaps to make up for the capon not being done enough, the haricots are done so much as to be quite bitter. I pretend to eat a few, but thinking that the joke had been carried far enough, I get up, put my hands to my stomach, and say: “Your Malaga has had the same effect on me as *limonade-Royé*, so you must excuse me if I go.”

“What, going already, without waiting for dessert? But at least madame will stay?”

“But my wife did not wish to stay, any more than I did, for we were both dying of hunger; so we took our leave, and our host called after us:

“The next time we will have some of my game.”

“But this time was quite enough for me. I must confess that the whole affair was very funny, and

we laughed about it after we had dined. But these are the sort of things to which one is exposed when one yields to the importunities of people one knows but little of, for it is a great mark of confidence to dine with anybody, and the person who gives you a bad dinner abuses your confidence, for I maintain that you ought either not to invite people, or to treat them really well if you do.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE GOD-DAUGHTER.

M. ROCAILLE's tale amused them all very much, the more so as Léocadie declared that her husband had neither exaggerated nor added anything, and that it had happened just as he had related it.

'I am very glad you have told me,' M. Brochenbiche said, 'for M. Gateau has often asked me to lunch; but I never go to houses where I am not sure that they treat you well.'

'Is that meant as a compliment for me?' Madame Dartinelle asked.

'No; it is only a matter of fact. I do not mean to say that I am a greedy man; I eat very little——'

'He took twice of that macaroni,' Rocaille whispered to his neighbour.'

'Have a glass of Pomard, Brochenbiche?'

'No, thank you; I will stick to claret; I never mix my wines.'

'This Pomard is nectar,' M. Lambert observed.

'Well, then, I will risk just a very small drop to taste it.'

After fat George had filled Brochenbiche's glass,

who pretended not to notice it, he said to his intimate friend :

‘Well, Gontran, what are you thinking of? You seem to have lost your usual cheerfulness.’

‘I suppose he is thinking of the garters he had given him,’ Hortense said, jokingly.

‘You appear to find fault with what the girl did, madame, but without her I should certainly have caught a cold in my head at least.’

‘I do not find fault with her at all; I only think the wind was very kind to you this morning.’

‘Dear me,’ Rocaille said, ‘I only wish such an adventure would happen to me.’

‘What are you daring to say?’

‘Nothing, Léocadie; I was only joking.’

‘Gentlemen,’ Madame Dartinelle said ‘I hope during dessert, or in the course of the evening, to procure you a little pleasant distraction.’

‘Madame,’ Oswald said, ‘in your society one cannot wish for it; quite the contrary.’

‘You know, M. Lambert, that I am not fond of compliments, but this is what I mean. I have a god-daughter—a very pretty god-daughter—for whom I stood sponsor when I was ten years old, and now she is eighteen.’

‘Take care, my dear,’ Madame Rocaille said; ‘you are letting us know that you are twenty-eight.’

‘That is my age, and I have no reason for hiding it. But to return to my god-daughter. She is eighteen, a pretty girl, dark—but you shall judge for yourselves this evening, for she is going to be married in a week, and her future husband is a decent young fellow—a laundryman. I have not seen him yet, but this evening the mamma is to introduce her son-in-law to me, as she has been recommending him to me for my custom, and, at the same time, she is going to invite us to do her

the honour of coming to her daughter's wedding—my god-daughter, you understand—and, of course, I cannot refuse.'

'Why should you refuse?' George said, 'a village wedding will be very amusing and funny, and very different from all those ceremonious wedding, entertainments at which one yawns fit to crack one's jaws. I shall enjoy going to it, and you must come with us, Gontran.'

Ever since Madame Dartinelle has been giving them these details about her-god-daughter, Gontran has been thinking about the girl whom he met that morning, and who had told him that she was going to be married in a week. The description which *the handsome widow* gave of the bride also tallied exactly with Félicite's appearance, but he took care not to mention this, and merely said to his friend:

'I shall be very glad to go with you to this wedding in the village if I am invited, which I am not.'

'That makes no difference, for we can take anybody we know who would like to go with us, and we are quite certain that our friends will be well received; am I not right, sister?'

'Certainly; especially as I think, George, you do not intend to go to the dinner, but only to the ball in the evening, and we can take any one who wishes to the ball with us.'

'If that is so,' Oswald said, 'let me put my name down to accompany you to this wedding; as I have never been to a similar entertainm~~nt~~ it will be a double pleasure for me——'

'As you please, monsieur.'

'We will go, also, Rocaille. I know Mother Boula-four a little; she is a clear-starcher, and used to do *for me*, but she charged too much; it is her daughter who is going to be married, is it not, my dear?'

'Yes, madame; Félicité Boulafeur is my god-daughter.'

'Why is not her name Hortense, like her god-mother's?'

'Because her mother was so fond of the name Félicité, but Hortense is also one of her names, though she is never called by it.'

'I should like nothing better than to go to that wedding,' Rocaille said, 'especially if the bride is pretty, as Madame Dartinelle says she is.'

'Yes, my god-daughter has none of that loutish, embarrassed manner about her which one finds so often in country girls. Her eyes are mischievous and clever, and I am sure you will be pleased with her. However, you will be able to judge for yourselves very soon, and M. Gontran will tell you whether she is nicer than his girl of the garter.'

He smiled and said: 'You are still thinking about her, madame?'

'And you?'

'I? You know very well that when I am with you I do not dare to sigh after——'

'That is all very fine; you are in the habit of asking permission, I should think?'

These last words were uttered in a low tone, so as not to be heard by any one but themselves.

'I should not go to the wedding, even were we to be asked. One gets very tired, and comes home late, and when anyone is in pain like I am—now it is between my shoulders.'

'I am glad to see that it is not in your jaws, for you are employing them very well.'

'I suppose that you are going to tell me that I am eating too much?'

'Where is this wedding entertainment going to take place?'

'I don't know, but most likely at the best inn in the neighbourhood.'

‘I really do not know that I shall not go to the dinner,’ George observed; ‘the country feasts are very original sometimes.’

‘You will only embarrass the good folks, and they will be quite satisfied if we go to the ball.’

‘My dear sister, there is one way by which one need never embarrass them, and that is, to do as they do; your laundrymen will dine in their shirt sleeves; very well, I will take off my coat on my arrival.’

‘Good gracious! and if the women dance without their stays, shall we be expected to do the same?’

‘You need not be at all uneasy, as I am sure that everything will be done very properly at my god-daughter’s wedding, unless these gentlemen choose to make a disturbance.’

‘I hope you have not got such a bad opinion of us, my dear sister; we will make your peasant girls dance very properly, not jump them too high, but we will be guided in that by these gentlemen.’

‘At such sort of balls they ought to dance *The Little Milk Girl*, and dances where kissing goes on, in the old-fashioned manner; our fathers were very well off.’

‘Hold your tongue, for there is nothing more objectionable than those figures. Fancy being obliged to kiss anybody you did not know or disliked, how very disagreeable! I think that our grandfathers were very fond of kissing, and that we have much improved matters.’

‘Well, yes; you are right, there is a good deal less kissing in public, but I do not think the devil loses much on that account’

‘At least, appearances are respected.’

‘Appearances, yes; they are the curtain behind which everything is permissible; but the curtain must be carefully drawn.’

The dessert had just been put on the table, when

the footman announced that Madame Boulafour and her daughter wished to know whether they might have the honour of paying their respects to Madame Dartinelle.

‘Of course, show them in; but is not there a gentleman with them?’

‘No, madame, only the mother and daughter.’

‘Never mind, let them come in. You will not mind my receiving them here, at table?’

‘We shall be very pleased, on the contrary.’

‘By Jove,’ said George, ‘we will make mother Boulafour and her daughter drink a glass of champagne.’

The two villagers were shown in. The old one was an enormous woman, as broad as she was long; she had no waist, and was merely like a cask on two legs. She may have been pretty, and even graceful, once upon a time; as it was, however, nothing remained of it but a fat blotchy face, two eyes hidden by her huge cheeks, and a nose like a corkscrew, which was covered with pimples. As for her daughter—Madame Dartinelle’s god-daughter—we will not draw her portrait, as you know her already, but will only say that she had paid great attention to her dress, in order to pay this visit, and that at first sight, under her little cap, which was so neatly plaited, and so jauntily put on, in her well-fitting dress of a stuff which was a mixture of silk and cotton, with her eyes which she kept fixed on the ground, and her modest look, one would not have immediately recognised the little village girl, with her rustic attractions, who had been picking up walnuts in the morning.

But Gontran could not be mistaken, and besides he had not felt the slightest doubt since Hortense had mentioned the name of her god-daughter, and the only thing that he is now afraid of is, that when she sees him, she may utter some exclamation which

may betray the fact that she is the heroine of the adventure in which the wind played such an important part, and he thought that it was as well, for her sake, that the company which was present there should not know anything about it, for otherwise poor Félicité would be exposed to a number of jokes which the other gentlemen, and especially her god-mother's brother, would plague her with.

So when the two women were shown into the dining room, Gontran was careful to keep his head down that he might not be seen. The washer-woman made curtesy upon curtesy, and seeing so many people, did not know whether to come forward or not, and when Félicité had made her bow, she had to push her mother on to prevent her from remaining against the door, whilst Madame Boulafour murmured: 'I beg your pardon, madame, and the company's if I am disturbing you; I have come at the wrong time; please excuse me.'

'Do not stop there, Madame Boulafour, for these ladies and gentlemen are very anxious to see my god-daughter. Come here, Félicité, and let one look at you, for I have told them that I am proud of my god-daughter, and I do not wish you to put me in the wrong.'

The girl and her mother came towards Madame Dartinelle, and luckily Brochenbiche was on the side of the table by which they came round, so Gontran, hidden behind the lady of the house, could not at first be seen by the new-comers. On her way up the room Félicité had heard murmurs of approval, and when her god-mother took her by the hand, and introduced her to her guests, saying: 'Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce my god-daughter to you, who is going to be married in a week,' they all exclaimed how pretty she was, and paid her various compliments. But as Hortense had not heard Gontran's voice amongst those of the

gentlemen who were praising her god-daughter, she turned to him, saying :

‘ Well, sir, have you no word for the bride ? ’

Gontran was very much embarrassed ; he cannot escape her notice, and is obliged to turn towards the young person who is close to Hortense, but he manages it so that he meets Félicité’s looks almost behind *the handsome widow’s* back. When she recognises the handsome gentleman to whom she gave the garter in the morning, the pretty girl cannot prevent a movement and exclamation of surprise, but nobody noticed it, and only Hortense heard the exclamation, and turning round, she asked :

‘ What is the matter, my dear child ? ’

‘ Nothing, god-mother,’ she replied, ‘ but I trod on something that made me slip, and I was afraid of falling.’

Whilst saying this in a troubled voice, Félicité looked at Gontran, and gave him a little sign to say that she understood it all, so he said immediately :

‘ Madame, I congratulate you on having such a god-daughter, and I am delighted to make her acquaintance. If she will allow me to come to the ball at her wedding, I shall be very proud if she will permit me to dance a quadrille wit’ her.’

Félicité bowed, and stammered :

‘ Oh, sir, it would . . . be a great honour . . . I assure you . . . for me.’

‘ Yes, sir,’ Madame Bonlafour replied, ‘ we shall be highly flattered if you will come to the wedding, you and all the present company, and all Madame Dartinelle’s friends and acquaintances, as she is my daughter’s god-mother, and has given her a very nice dowry.’

‘ Be quiet, Madame Boulafour, you must not speak about that.’

‘ I should like to know why I am not to mention it ? There are so many people who are fond of doing

harm, that it is pleasant to be able to mention those who do good.'

'But I thought, Madame Boulafour that you were to introduce me to your future son-in-law this evening, Monsieur Cadet Fouillaupot (*Fouillaupot* literally means *Saucepan rummager*), whom I do not know.'

Everybody burst out laughing at the future husband's name, and cried out: *Fouillaupot!*

'What,' said George, 'is the name of this charming young lady's husband really Fouillaupot?'

'Yes, sir, with your permission, that is my son-in-law's name; and why should it not be? It is a name like any other, and besides, what does a name signify as long as he is an honest man and a good worker? that's the chief thing, isn't it?'

'Certainly, Madame Boulafour,' Hortense replied, 'don't pay any attention to my brother's jokes; as long as my god-daughter is happy, it does not matter about the name.'

'Oh,' Félicité said, 'my intended always calls himself Cadet, and I shall never call him anything else.'

'You will be quite right, my dear; Cadet is much more simple, and everybody will envy his good fortune.'

'But, now, you have not answered my question,' Hortense resumed, 'why Monsieur Cadet did not come with you?'

'Well, madame, I am sure it was not his fault. He was to have called for us at eight o'clock, and we waited till nearly nine, and my daughter, who was impatient, would not wait any longer, for she was determined to see her god-mother to-day, and said: "If he comes now, it will be a lesson for him how he keeps me waiting another time."'

'Well done! She is quite right,' George exclaimed, 'she is not made to be kept waiting.'

'But I am quite sure,' the laundress continued,

‘that it was not Cadet’s fault that he did not come. He must have been detained at Monsieur Poupard’s, who is a man that is very well off, and is giving up his business to my son-in-law; so he, of course, must show him some consideration. Do you know Monsieur Poupard, madame?’

‘Only by name.’

‘And what is the business of this man who is so well off?’ asked George, laughing.

‘He is a master laundryman, and the cream of men. He is sure to come to the wedding, and you shall see him.’

‘I should like to see this cream of men, for I have hitherto only known the milk of the species.’

Whilst her mother was talking, Félicité threw several stolen glances at Gontran, who did his best to keep his countenance, but although the girl leaned against her god-mother and bent behind her when she looked at the man to whom she had given her garter, Hortense, turning round suddenly, intercepted one of these stolen glances, and that roused her suspicions.

‘Madame Boulafour, will there be a supper at this pretty bride’s wedding?’

‘Well, sir, I cannot exactly say that; in fact, I know that during the evening there will be only light refreshments. But, then, the wedding dinner will be good and copious; we shall sit down at three o’clock, and not rise from the table till nine, so as to have plenty of time for eating. I hope that you, sir, and all the ladies and gentlemen who are here, will do us the honour of coming to it.’

‘Thank you, you are very kind, but the ladies say we shall come to the ball.’

‘I am sorry for that, for I hoped that you would do us the honour to have joined us at dinner.’

‘Listen to me, Madame Boulafour,’ George said, ‘I will arrange matters so as to satisfy everybody. I

will provide the wedding supper, and I will take care that it shall be worthy of the bride.'

'A supper! Really, Monsieur, you are too good. Upon my word, I am really very much inclined to accept your offer; what do you say, Félicité?'

'Well, mother, I say that it would make the evening extremely merry, and since this gentleman is so polite, we ought to accept his offer. I am sure that Cadet would not refuse it.'

'Then we accept your supper, Monsieur Vari-court, and we will take care not to stuff ourselves too full at dinner, so as to leave room for the supper.'

'That's right; but, by-the-bye, where is the wedding dinner to be held? I want to know, so that I may order my supper there.'

'At the *Horn of Plenty*, Monsieur. The landlord is an excellent caterer, and there are handsome rooms, a garden and shrubberies.'

'Very well, at the *Horn of Plenty*, then. I like that sign for a house; did your daughter choose the place?'

'No, Monsieur, it was Cadet Fouillaupot.'

'That shows his intelligence.'

'I think your idea of a supper is delightful,' Gontran said.

'Yes,' Rocaille added, 'and I can assure you, Madame Boulafour, that you may depend on us.'

'Oh! we will come also,' Rosina Brochenbiche said; 'suppers are always amusing, are they not, my dear?'

'We will go! Be good enough to speak for yourself. Suffering as I do, do you wish me to go and sit up the whole night? I should be a nice object the next day.'

'You would not be any different to what you always are, as you are always ill; but if you will not go, I shall go with Madame-Dartinelle.'

‘Now that we have had the honour of seeing your God-mother and her company,’ the laundress said, ‘we will go home, Félicité.’

‘Yes, mother.’

‘Wait a moment,’ George exclaimed, ‘you must drink a glass of champagne first, so that we may clink our glasses together, and drink to the bride’s health.’

‘That is indeed an honour; well, we don’t object to the champagne. What an idiot Cadet was not to come!’

The laundress and her daughter had a glass of champagne, and the health of the future married couple was drank, and whilst the mother was taking another glass, Hortense rose and made a sign to Félicité to follow her, which she obeyed, after looking at Gontran again. Madame Dartinelle took her god-daughter into the next room, where they were alone, and looking at her steadily, she said:

‘Where did you go to this morning, Félicité?’

‘This morning, god-mother? I went to see my cousin, the dressmaker, who is making my wedding dress.’

‘Does she live far from here?’

‘Yes, very near Sceaux.’

‘And on the way to her house, you amused yourself by picking up the walnuts which the wind had blown down?’

Félicité was embarrassed; she blushed and stammered:

‘Oh, god-mother, how do you know——’

‘What happened to you this morning, with that gentleman who was sitting on my right? Yes, I know all about it, for M. Gontran told us his adventure.’

‘Well, then, god-mother, you know that it was not my fault, but that the wind was the cause of it all.’

‘Certainly, the wind in the first place; but then, one does not generally amuse one’s self by picking up walnuts in such weather.’

‘Yes, one does, god-mother, for the wind knocks them down.’

‘Well, never mind about that part of the adventure. Afterwards, you found M. Dalby’s cap and gave it back to him.’

‘Ought not I to have done that?’

‘Yes, but you need not have done anything more, and certainly you ought not to have taken off one of your garters to give to this gentleman.’

‘I had nothing else for a strap to his cap, and without that, blowing as it was, it would not have remained on his head very long——’

‘That is no business of yours, you ought to have given him his cap, and gone on.’

‘He had been so polite to me when the wind blew my petticoats over my head . . . when I could not see anything——’

‘Why, anybody would have done the same for you.’

‘Many would have taken a long time about it.’

‘Well, my dear child, remember that it is not at all proper to give your garters to a young man, and how do you think your intended husband would like it, were he to know it?’

‘Oh, dear! not at all, for he is dreadfully jealous. But the gentleman will not tell him about it, I hope. You will ask him not to, god-mother?’

‘There is no need for me to do that; didn’t you see just now that M. Gontran pretended not to know you when he was paying you those compliments?’

‘Yes; but how did you guess that I was the heroine of this morning’s adventure?’

‘Do you imagine that I did not see your signs and the stolen glances that you gave him? You are not clever enough, my dear, to deceive me, though that

may come. Meanwhile, be very prudent, and do not talk with M. Dalby alone, for he has the reputation of being a gallant; and if you do so, it might bring about disagreeable scenes between your husband and you.'

'I will be sure and follow your advice, god-mother.'

'And now, come, we will go back to the rest of the company.'

Hortense took Félicité back to her mother, and said to her:

'I wanted to ask Félicité about a number of things; that is why I took the liberty of carrying her off.'

'Why, madame, you are quite right to do that, she is nearly as much your child as mine; but during your absence they have made me drink so much, that I am beginning to see double. Let us go, Félicité. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, till next Saturday at the *Horn of Plenty*, and at church in the morning—'

'You may rely upon us, Madame Boulafour.'

The laundress went away with her daughter, who curtsied to everybody, but without looking at Gontran, and when Hortense sat down again she looked at him with a mocking smile, and said in a low voice:

'I guessed it, . . . that was the girl—'

Gontran smiled back, and replied:

'I was quite sure, madame, that it would be impossible to try and hide anything from you.'

CHAPTER VII.

CADET FOUILLAUPOT.

Félicité and her mother had gone they all gave various opinions of the bride-elect.'

'She is very pretty,' Oswald Lambert said, 'but she put on a little timid air which I do not think is at all natural to her, for she looks thoroughly wide-awake.'

'She is all very well for a laundress,' Léocadie observed; 'but she is certainly not beautiful.'

'I think she is very attractive,' Rosina said, 'and her black eyes are very bright; don't you think so, Brochenbiche?'

The fancied invalid shook his head, and replied: 'She has too much colour, and her cheeks are pink, which is a bad sign; it denotes a weak chest.'

'Well, George exclaimed, 'if she is ever consumptive, I will become transparent; and what do you think of her, Gontran?'

'I think she is very nice; a pretty little peasant girl.'

'Is not she as good as your girl with the garter?'

'Not at all the same style; she is far superior.'

'That is very strange,' Rocaille said; 'it seemed to me that she was just about the same; but no, I think Madame Dartinelle's god-daughter was taller; don't you think so?'

'Much taller and slimmer,' Gontran replied, looking at the *handsome widow*, who murmured almost inaudibly:

'You certainly can tell a fib in a most perfect manner; one can easily see that you are used to it.'

Mother Boulafour and her daughter had hardly been gone a quarter of an hour, and the others were still at table enjoying the dessert, when the servant came in and said:

'Here is M. Cadet Fouillaupot, who wishes to pay his respects to the god-mother of his future wife.'

'Well, the son-in-law is late, but of course you can show him in.'

'I am very curious to see this M. Fouillaupot,' George said, after the servant had shown him

‘for if he looks at all to correspond to his name he must be a queer-looking object.’

‘You must wait, gentlemen, wait and see; for names are very often deceptive.’

The servant came again, alone.

‘Why does not the gentleman come in?’ Hortense asked.

‘I beg your pardon, madame, but there is another man with him, and he begs that you will allow him to introduce his employer to you.’

‘There seems to be no end to this; it is a regular evening of introductions. But, of course, he is very welcome to introduce his superior to us.’

‘Upon my word,’ George said; ‘that is the man of whom Mother Boulafour spoke to us. . . . The cream of men. . . . Attention, gentlemen, attention! Let us hope that this cream which we are going to see to-night will do us honour.’

The two men appeared in the door of the dining room. Cadet Fouillaupot is a tall young fellow, as long and thin as a stick of asparagus, with a pointed head and nose, light blue eyes, which he is continually rolling about from right to left, as if he were always looking for somebody, and with a generally stupid air, whilst trying to look knowing, but without success.

His employer, M. Poupard, is a little man of about fifty-five, fat and podgy, who looks like a ball, smiles continually, and never speaks without bowing all round. The two together have a very queer effect, standing still, as they are doing, in the doorway. Neither of them wishes to be the first to enter; the ball pushes the asparagus, who in turn retreats in order to make way for the ball, and this polite strife lasts so long that George cries out:

‘Come in together, that will be the best thing you can do!’

The bridegroom and his employer follow his ad-

vice; and when they have come in, Cadet, holding the short man by the hand, goes up to Madame Dartinelle, and stammers out:

‘Madame, may I be allowed to introduce my employer, M. Poupard, to you, who is going to give up his business to me on the occasion of my marriage with Félicité Boulafour, whom I am about to marry, and also wished to pay his respects to the god-mother of Félicité, whom I am going to marry, and it will all go on wheels, as I have all his customers.’

Whilst his late assistant was expressing himself thus, M. Poupard had never left of bowing to the lady of the house, and Hortense, wishing to put an end to all this bending, which must be terribly fatiguing to such a stout man, answered:

‘I am delighted to make your employer’s acquaintance, and I am much obliged to him for his visit.’

Here M. Poupard tried to speak:

‘Yes, madame, certainly, oh! certainly, madame——’

He could not get out the rest, and so Hortense continued:

‘But, M. Fouillaupot, we have just seen your intended and her mother, who expected you. Why did you not come with them, as Madame Boulafour wished to introduce her son-in-law to me herself?’

‘Well, madame, let me tell you something. In business, as my employer told you so clearly just now, one is not always free, like a bird in the air, for if the bird were a laundryman, it certainly would not have time to fly about so much.’

‘That is, indeed, a very profound reflection,’ George observed, ‘and I wonder how M. Fouillaupot came by such deep thoughts!’

‘The fact is . . . I will tell you something. I

have read a good deal, and, I can assure you, with much profit.'

'That is evident to anyone who listens to you, and I am sure your employer must be proud of his pupil.'

M. Poupard bowed, and stammered out:

'Sir, as far as regards me . . . I assure you . . . and then . . . I have a great regard for Cadet.'

'Thank you, master; and I am sure I reciprocate the feeling.'

'Gentlemen, let us drink a glass of champagne to the happiness of the future married couple.'

'We shall be happy, for—let me tell you something . . . drinking champagne is one of my fixed ideas, especially as I have never tasted it.'

The champagne gave M. Poupard a little more assurance, and he thought that he ought to hob and nob with everybody present, and, as for Cadet Fouillaupot, who wished to show off as a fine speaker, he became very talkative, and kept continually repeating his favourite phrase, '*I want to tell you something.*'

'Do you know, M. Fouillaupot, that you will have a very pretty wife?' Rocaille said.

'Yes, monsieur, I know that; I am convinced of it, but it was *my fixed idea* to have a pretty wife.'

'She has a pair of very expressive black eyes,' George observed.

'Yes, they are very bright, monsieur. But I will tell you something; she must keep straight, or else . . . I beg your pardon, I was going to say something stupid.'

'Go on, whilst you are about it.'

'Well, I was going to say that if Félicité kicked over the traces, things would go badly.'

'Why, you don't mean to say that you are jealous?' Léocadie asked him. 'That's very ridiculous.'

'Madame, I will tell you something. I had rather be ridiculous than . . . you know what I mean!'

‘But the one does not obviate the other.’

‘That is not all, however. I shall go straight, and my wife must go straight also; and I mean to make her do as I please.’

‘Take care, M. Fouillaupot,’ Hortense said; ‘my god-daughter is rather hot-headed; I know her and have studied her, and you will never do anything with her by trying to lord it over her, though you can always bring her over by kindness.’

‘Oh, madame, you need not be at all alarmed, for I will tell you something; I am as gentle as a lamb as long as I am not thwarted, but in married life I expect only virtue and faithfulness, like turtle-doves; is not that so master? and when it is a question of one’s honour, it is not the proper time for joking.’

‘Certainly,’ the great ball replied, bowing to the servant, who went past him. ‘Of course, faithfulness in married life is a necessity. My late wife left me several times, but it was from good motives. When she had a friend or relative who was ill, she would say to me: “Just look here, friendship calls me; I fly to answer its summons, but do not trouble yourself, I will come back to you——.” And, as a matter of fact, she always did come back, looking uncommonly well.’

‘That proves, M. Poupard, that you were not jealous,’ Léocadie said, ‘and that is much to your credit.’

‘Well, as for me,’ Cadet exclaimed, ‘I shall not be so accommodating as my master. My wife might say to me: “Friendship calls me,” as much as ever she pleased, but my answer would be: “Let it call as much it likes, but I forbid you to answer, or to leave your hymeneal hearth,” because—I will tell you something; when a woman is away from her husband, and another man tries to cajole her, well—you may be told “once is not always”;

that is all very well, but I shall know the proverb :
“When one has seen the wolf one returns to it.”

Everybody burst out laughing, and Gontran said :

‘Upon my word, I never heard that proverb before ; but it is uncommonly good.’

‘It is quite true, isn’t it sir ?’

‘Like all proverbs, which have been called *the wisdom of nations*, and yet they lie sometimes.’

‘Shall you and your wife live with your mother-in-law ?’ Hortense asked the future husband.

‘No, madame, we shall have our own little place to ourselves, for one does not always agree with one’s mother-in-law ; they always take their daughter’s part. I have taken Lucas’s cottage, and they are going to furnish it, and I am sure nothing will be wanting. My old aunt, who is rather blind and deaf, answers the door ; she makes capital onion soup.’

Madame Dartinelle now got up, and said :

‘I have been working a little present which I want to give your wife at her wedding : come with me for a moment and I will show it to you.’

‘I am quite at your disposal, madame, as soon as there is any question of a present—and even without that——’

‘M. Poupard can come with us ; he shall be in the secret.’

‘Master, do you hear ; come along, you are to be in the secret.’

Hortense took the two men into her bedroom, where she opened a cupboard and took out a charming muslin dressing jacket, covered with embroidery, and, showing it to Cadet, she said :

‘That is what I am going to give to my god-daughter, and I want her to find it in her room when you take her home after the ball.’

'That is pretty, indeed; just look at it, master.'

'Yes; what is it—a chemise?'

'No; it is a dressing jacket.'

'Oh! a dressing jacket; and when will she wear it?'

'Before going to bed, or on getting up, like a dressing gown.'

'Oh, of course, a dressing gown; how nice Félicité will look in it. If you will give it to me, Madame, I will take care of it until the grand day.'

'No, you cannot have it yet, for it is not quite finished, as I must put some lace on it for trimming, and I can only get that in Paris. My present must be taken to her new home without my god-daughter knowing anything about it.'

'I will tell you something; I will come and fetch it before the dinner.'

'On the wedding day! You will have no time, and your wife would be very much surprised if you were to leave her; but I think it can be managed. Of course, M. Poupard will be at the dinner?'

'Certainly, madame,' he said, with a bow, 'and twice rather than once.'

'Now, he could come and go without anyone noticing his absence; so, perhaps, you will be kind enough to come here for the dressing jacket, and take it secretly to their house? No doubt you know the house; but what will the aunt say to letting you in?'

'That will be all right. I am sure you will not mind coming here before dinner, fetching the present, and then taking it to our house. You can put it on the bridal bed, where Félicité will be surprised to find it on coming in.'

'Of course I will come for it, but you must tell the old woman who has charge of the house to let me in.'

'I will tell you something; my aunt is looking

after it, she is nearly blind, and then she knows you; so all you need say, on going in, is: "I am Fouillaupot's master." That will be quite enough, and she will let you go anywhere you like in the house.'

'That is settled then.'

'And now, gentlemen, I must beg you to keep my secret.'

'You may be quite easy, madame; it shall be just as if we had never heard it.'

'And besides, I will tell you something; if we were to talk about it, there would not be any surprise, and I am very anxious to surprise my wife on our wedding day.'

Madame Dartinelle returned to her guests, and the bridegroom and his master are just taking leave of everybody, when George stops Cadet, and says to him:

'M. Fouillaupot, I told your two ladies that I should invite all the guests at your wedding to supper, and I hope that you will accept my invitation?'

'A supper! I shall be delighted to accept, sir; no one ever thinks of refusing a supper, don't you think so master?'

The round ball bows, and says:

'Never, especially as I am always hungry at night. It is very polite of the gentleman, and I propose, Cadet, that you allow him to take your wife's garters.'

'I am quite willing, and I will tell you something; I gave Félicité a very pretty pair a short time ago, and they ought to be quite presentable still.'

Hortense looked at Gontran, who tries not to laugh, and George replies:

'But to take her garters, I should have to come to the dinner, which I cannot do.'

'Oh! that can be managed, monsieur; that part

of the ceremony can be put off till supper time to suit you.'

'That is all right then, and I will go and hunt for the garter.'

'Oh, I did not mean you yourself; little Balot shall be your deputy.'

'And pray why should I not get it for myself, M. Fouillaupot? it is the most delightful part of the ceremony. (In France, amongst the lower classes, it was, and is still, customary for a boy or youth to creep under the table during the wedding dinner to take off the bride's garters, which then belong to the best man).'

'Why, Monsieur, don't you see you are too old to go and crawl under the table——'

'What the devil are you making a fuss about? I intend to crawl under the table, and shall do the business very well.'

'If you really wish it—you can crawl on all fours. But I must tell you that I do not intend to spend the whole night in dancing; it would be too tiring for my wife. It is only reasonable that I should take her home at two o'clock in the morning, though the others can go on dancing as long as they like.'

'But, M, Fouillaupot, it would be very unkind to deprive us of your wife's company so soon.'

'I beg your pardon; I am not going to marry her for other people, but for myself. And now, master, let us say good bye, and regain our *Lares*, as the story in the supplement says; and a very good story it was, only it was never finished. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, till we meet again.'

As soon as the two villagers had left, the ladies, who thought they had been a long time over dinner, rose from the table and went into the drawing-room; but the gentlemen did not follow them, for they remained smoking and drinking more champagne,

'What do you think of the future husband,

gentlemen?' George said. 'Don't you think, as I do, that it is a great pity that such a head of asparagus should marry such a pretty girl as Félicité? My sister's god-daughter has very expressive eyes, whilst M. Fouillaupot's express nothing but stupidity and mistrust; for one easily sees that the fellow will be absurdly jealous. Just think of his already talking about taking his wife off early! What are you laughing at, Gontran?'

'Because he did not wish you yourself to go and take the bride's garter's, and though he gave way, he made a grimace about it, and I think by this time he is sorry that you have invited them to supper.'

'What an idiot he is! Does he imagine that he can always keep his wife under his eyes?'

'I will try and persuade my wife to give Fouillaupot our washing to do, for the wives often bring the linen, and then I will watch for her coming.'

'Gentlemen,' Brochenbiche said, 'if I had not such a pain in my side as prevents me thinking about love matters, I should have liked to have played the husband a lot of tricks on his wedding day.'

'It would be capital fun,' Lambert said, 'to have a joke with the fellow.'

'The best trick to play him,' Gontran observed, 'would be to prevent him passing his wedding night with his wife.'

'What an excellent idea!' George exclaimed. 'If you like, we will all vow to assist each other, should it be necessary, in any enterprise to prevent M. Fouillaupot from passing the first night after his wedding with the charming Félicité.'

'Yes! yes! yes! Capital; we will all agree.'

'Let us do something more. Let us make a bet, and the man who succeeds best shall stand the others a dinner.'

'So the one who wins loses?'

‘That will make it all the more amusing.’

‘Very well, we will all agree.’

‘That is settled, then; but not a word of our plan to the ladies, for they would make a noise, and tell the husband.’

‘We will not mention it to them; surely we men can hold our tongues.’

‘That is all right; and now let us go and join the ladies.’

CHAPTER VIII.

HOSTILITIES BEGIN.

THE gentlemen kept their word, and said nothing about their plans for pretty Félicité’s wedding day. But ever since Madame Dartinelle knew that her god-daughter was the heroine of that adventure in which the wind had played so great a part, she often looks at Gontran in a peculiar manner, and tries to find out how he spends the intervening days before the wedding. One might almost think that she is afraid lest that accomplished seducer should find another opportunity of meeting the girl; and when Mamma Boulafour came to tell her one morning that her daughter was coming to show her wedding dress to madame, Hortense said:

‘I do not wish Félicité to put herself out to come and show it to me. When she is on the eve of being married she must be very busy, so I will go myself to your house to see the dress; it will be an object for a walk for me, and on my return she shall take me and show me the house where she and her husband are going to live.’

So the next morning *the handsome widow* went out alone, leaving Gontran and her brother to play

billiards, and went to Madame Boulafour's to see the pretty dress, and everything else that was required to complete the bride's toilet; and then she said to Félicité:

'Now you must take me to see where you are going to live when you get married. I suppose you have already the right to go into the house?'

'I should rather think so!' the laundress exclaimed. 'It would indeed be queer if we could not go in, when I furnished the house for the children. You shall see how nice it all is, madame.'

Hortense and her god-daughter started together, and, as they were going, the former said:

'Félicité, have you seen M. Gontran since you and your mother came to my house the other evening?'

'No, god-mother, I have not seen the gentleman again—that is to say I saw him in the distance yesterday, but I did not speak to him.'

'Oh! so you saw him in the distance; where was it?'

'I was coming out of our cottage, where we are going now, and the gentleman was in the path opposite, for we have a little house all to ourselves, which is very delightful.'

'Yes, yes! M. Gontran was in the path opposite; and what was he doing there?'

'I don't know; he was looking up into the air, and I believe he was admiring our cottage.'

'And did he come to you when he saw you?'

'I should rather think he was coming, but he stopped quite suddenly, because Cadet, who was in the house, came out to join me.'

'Ah! I understand. Félicité, if this young man tries to talk to you, you must avoid him. Do you understand?'

'Yes, god-mother. Has he mentioned what happened to me under the walnut tree, and my

garter? You were sure to ask him not to speak about it, I hope?’

‘You may be quite easy on that score; he has not mentioned it, and will not mention it, but nevertheless he must not speak to you again.’

‘What could he say to me?’

‘Oh! don’t be silly, for you know quite well what a polite, well-bred man can say to a woman from whom he hopes to obtain some favours; and I tell you again that this M. Gontran is one of those men who like to deceive and seduce every woman they meet.’

‘Do you mean to say that you think he is in love with me god-mother?’

‘Not at all—not the least in the world; you surely do not fancy that such gentlemen are ever in love? He would only amuse himself at your expense, and then make fun of you; and, now I have warned you, be on your guard.’

‘Yes, god-mother; but here we are.’

In villages there are to be found small houses inhabited by only one family; and that in which Cadet and Félicité were to live was one of those. It consisted of only a ground and first floor. Below, the front door opened into a small passage, on the right of which there was the room destined for the old aunt, who was to live with the young couple and open the door; and on the other side there was a large room which was to serve for laundry purposes. At the end of the passage a narrow staircase led upstairs to the storey above, which consisted of two rooms, one of which was the dining-room, and the other the bedroom for husband and wife, and all the elegance and comfort which a village can imagine was reserved for it. Everything was fresh and new—wall paper, ceiling, furniture; and though it contained neither a bookcase nor china vases, it had an excellent bed, a handsome chest of drawers, two easy

and some pretty common chairs, a work table, and on the mantelpiece a handsome looking-glass and a porcelain clock between two large candlesticks.

Félicité took her god-mother into her future home, where the old aunt was already installed on the ground floor. She had not heard the doors go because she was deaf, and, as she could hardly see, she smiled at Hortense, and said :

‘ Good day, Mother Boulafour. Have you come to have a look round upstairs with your daughter ? You will see how clean everything is ; I swept it all over this very morning.’

The handsome widow could not help bursting out laughing, while Félicité exclaimed :

‘ No, Aunt Nicoud, my mother is not with me ; it is my god-mother, Madame Dartinelle.’

‘ Oh ! it is a woman who sells crockery ware, is it ? Very well, transact your business, for I am going to make my soup.’

‘ My dear god-daughter, if you are going to depend upon this woman to tell you who your customers are that com and ask for you, I think that you will very often make mistakes.’

‘ No, god-mother, I am not going to depend on her. I took Aunt Nicoud because Cadet likes to have somebody to answer the door, but I am quite sure she will never see who comes in or goes out : luckily, I shall always be here.’

Madame Dartinelle duly admired the new abode, and then took leave of her god-daughter, without saying a word about the present she intended to give her ; but on returning home, when she happened to be alone with Gontran, she could not help saying to him :

‘ How do you like the house where Félicité and her husband are going to live ? ’

Gontran smiled, and then, without appearing to be the least embarrassed at her question, he replied :

‘How do you know, madame, that I know where your pretty little god-daughter is going to live?’

‘I ask you a question, and you answer me with another. You are very clever, monsieur, and it is a very successful way of getting out of giving an answer!’

‘I assure you, madame, that I had no such intention when I said that to you, and to prove this to you, I will tell you without hesitation that I think the future dwelling-place of the happy couple is very nicely situated, and looks very pretty. It seems to me to be an altogether suitable abode—as far as I can judge from the outside, that is, for I have not seen the interior.’

‘And it was, I presume, in the hope of seeing what it was like inside that you were taking a walk yesterday along the path which is just opposite that cottage?’

‘Exactly so, for I said to myself: “Upon my word, if that charming Félicité comes this way, I shall ask her to show me the inside of her house.”’

‘M. Gontran, your conduct is really disgraceful!’

‘You flatter me, madame.’

‘You are trying to profit by your accidental meeting with my god-daughter, by the folly she was guilty of when she gave you her garter.’

‘You really call such a meritorious action, such a charming inspiration, which saved my cap for me, *folly*? You are uncharitable, madame.’

‘What you are doing is very wrong. I certainly never particularly liked you, but now I hate you!’

‘A proof that I have at all events made some progress in your feelings towards me.’

‘But you shall not succeed in your wicked designs; I will watch over her till she is married.’

‘Perhaps it would be more to the purpose, madame, if you were to watch over her afterwards.’

Hortense was just going to reply, when visitors

arrived. They were Madame Rocaille, who had come to consult her neighbour about what head-dress she would wear at this village wedding, and Madame Brochenbiche, who had also come to consult her about her toilette; for it was to take place on the next day but one after, and so they had no time to lose.

Gontran bowed to the three ladies, and left them to their weighty deliberations; but as he bowed to the widow, he said, in a low voice: 'Are you still angry with me?'

'And she replied immediately: 'I detest you?' and therefore the young man went away, saying to himself:

'That is all right; so, so, madame, you do not wish anyone to speak to you of love! Formerly, all men were indifferent to you, and now you detest me! Hatred is much more akin to love than indifference.'

Gontran then went to look for fat George, who called out as soon as he saw him:

'I say, have you given up the idea of playing the husband a trick?'

'Not by any means; but I don't see the necessity of thinking about it beforehand; there will be plenty of time on the day itself, when there will be no lack of opportunities.'

'I do not agree with you; I have formed my plan beforehand, and I think I have discovered an excellent way for making this jealous husband allow me to dance with his wife.'

'What are the means?'

'Why, to make him drunk, of course, and nothing will be easier than that at supper. He took very kindly to champagne, and I will take care to give him enough.'

'I should advise you to take care, for these country fellows can drink a great lot without getting drunk.'

‘But then they do not drink champagne very often, and when M. Fouillaupot is quite tipsy, I will bet that his pretty wife will not go home with him. Oswald has gone back to Paris, but he will be here the day after to-morrow, and will most likely have some good idea in his head. As for Brochenbiche, he does not count, unless he manages to give the bridegroom a dose of medicine, so that there is only Rocaille remaining, and here he is ; he has come to tell us, no doubt, what his projects are.’

Their facetious neighbour came up to them with a radiant air, and shook hands with the two friends.

‘Good day, gentlemen ; are you alone ? That is all right ; I am delighted to meet you together, so let us talk over our little plans with regard to the charming bride, for the day after to-morrow is the day, and that will soon be here.’

‘Well, we know it is the day after to-morrow, but tell us, Rocaille, have you thought of any expedient to prevent the husband from carrying off his wife before daylight ?’

‘Of course, I have thought of one ; I have not been asleep, by Jove ; and I think I have a very bright idea.’

‘Let us hear it.’

‘At supper I will manage to get up a quarrel between the bridegroom and some rustic who is at the wedding, and whom I will tell that M. Fouillaupot has been making fun of him. Now, these country fellows have plenty of pride, and do not like to be made fun of, and, with the aid of the wine, my two game cocks will soon come to blows. Whilst they are fighting I shall slip a five-franc piece into the hands of a lad, who must pretend to have been wounded whilst trying to separate the opponents ; he will make a terrible noise, the police will be sent for, and when the gendarmes arrive they will arrest

the brawlers, lock them up, and the husband will spend the night in a cell instead of with his wife. Well! what do you say to that?’

The two friends shake their heads, and do not seem particularly taken with M. Rocaille’s plan.

‘It strikes me that it would be very difficult to carry it out,’ George said.

‘I don’t like the idea of arresting the husband,’ Gontran observed; ‘he must be got rid of by some other means.’

‘I really see no other, and this seems to me to be perfectly simple and natural. A dispute amongst peasants is not such a rare occurrence, and then blows are exchanged and the police appear on the scene; that is seen every day.’

‘That is possible; but I think it is a dangerous expedient; but you can try it if you like. I shall merely try and make the husband drunk. Gontran will, I suppose, try and have an assignation with the pretty bride, and we shall see what our friend Oswald Lambert will have thought of.’

CHAPTER IX.

THE WEDDING : THE SWING.

THE great day had arrived: the great day is the wedding day, on which one stakes one’s liberty, one’s heart, one’s person, all one’s future. It requires a good deal of thinking about before taking such a step, and Beaumarchais said: ‘One ought to think of it all one’s life;’ but then, probably, Beaumarchais was not happy in his married life, neither was Molière, nor La Fontaine, nor Jean Jacques Rousseau; Voltaire was clever, and never married.

The wedding festivities took place at an inn where

there was a large room for dancing, a large dining-room for meals, and a large garden for those persons who might wish to walk about; and in the garden there were shrubberies, which were quite thick enough for those who were fond of being *tête-à-tête*; and then there was a swing, ninepins, and bowls, but the swing had the preference, and the girls quarrelled about who should use it, for, as a rule, women like being swung. The spot was between the dwelling of the newly-married couple and Mamma Boulafour's, and pretty Félicité started from the latter house; and very charming she looks in her white dress with her bouquet of orange flowers, and she does not intend to change her dress all day, for in villages brides do not make their toilets twice over, and are not afraid of rumpling their wedding dress by wearing it at the ball; besides this, there is also very often another reason, which is that they have not anything prettier to put on for the evening.

They had gone to church. Madame Dartinelle is there with her brother and Gontran. The Rocailles and the Brochenbiches are also present at the ceremony; which, however, M. Poupard, Cadet's employer, could not attend, as he had been obliged to go to Paris in the morning after somebody who owed him money. He promised, however, to be back for the dinner, and they were to sit down at four o'clock sharp, so as to have plenty of time before the ball. Everybody admired the bride, who carried her white bouquet in a certain easy manner, which perhaps might suggest that she did not exactly deserve it, but it is always well to look at the best side of things, and all said: 'How pretty she is; how well she wears her fine clothes. She does not seem the least nervous. She does not look down, like brides generally do. Why should she? When one has such pretty eyes as she has, one ought to let them be seen.'

As she passed by her god-mother and the gentry of the neighbourhood, Félicité blushed with pleasure, for she could read in every look the pretty things that were said about her. When she noticed Gontran a mischievous smile came over her face, and the young man gave her a very expressive look ; but Cadet Fouillaupot is there, never taking his eyes off her, watching her slightest movement, and then looking proudly at all the people who are assembled there, as if to say : ‘ She is my wife, my property, so let nobody think of touching her ; I should not look upon it as a joke, and I should hit hard.’

After she had received the congratulations of her god-mother and the rest, and they had promised not to forget the ball in the evening, the bride is escorted to the inn, and whilst waiting for dinner they amuse themselves in different ways. The new wife can then still behave like a girl and amuse herself with her friends. Fouillaupot would indeed have liked, before dinner, to take his wife to their new dwelling for a few minutes ; but Félicité turned a deaf ear to his hints, and, besides that, the grooms-men do not leave the bride alone for an instant, and Mamma Boulafour says to her son-in-law :

‘ My lad, your wife belongs to you, and will not escape you ; but let her act the young girl to-day still. You must not rush upon her, like a wolf upon a lamb ; you will always find her at hand, so moderate your ardour a little and keep a little of it for next year.’ And he, seeing that he could not forestall the time for the enjoyment of his married rights, resigned himself patiently, and went on playing billiards with the men, saying :

‘ How tiresome that M. Poupard was obliged to go to Paris this morning ; but he will come in time for dinner, and he promised me that, before coming, he would be sure to call at Madame Dartinelle’s to fetch her present for Félicité, which he will im-

mediately take to our new house. My wife does not suspect anything, and it will surprise her very much when we get home to-night.'

Félicité had gone to amuse herself with her girl friends in the garden of the establishment, and they made haste to get to the swing. Some young fellows had remained with them to swing them, and every moment one can hear the usual peasant girl's laughter, enough to frighten an ox; but, in spite of this merry noise, the village lads always keep their eyes upwards trying to catch sight of the girl's ankles. Every moment you hear: 'I saw Geneviève's garters!' 'It isn't true, and besides, I have not got any.' 'Oh, Toinette has a hole in her stocking!' 'Put your nose into it to stop it; I don't mind.'

When it is Félicité's turn to swing, she bravely stands up on the seat, and one of the grooms men is swinging her very high, because she says she is not afraid. By-and-bye he cries out: 'Hullo! I saw something; I saw something!'

'What did you see, Bouchard?'

'I saw the bride's garter, but I could only see one.'

'Who dares to say that he saw my wife's garters?' Cadet exclaims, who has just left the billiard room to see what she was doing.

'I did, whilst I was swinging her; but I did not say I had seen her garters, for I only saw one.'

'Bouchard, it is lucky for you that you are my best man to-day, otherwise I should give you a thrashing.'

'What an ass he is! why, he is actually angry.'

'I don't choose anybody to see my wife's garters. Félicité, as when you are on the swing you run the risk of showing what your husband alone has the right of seeing, I beg that you will at once leave off this indecent amusement.'

‘Oh, the jealous fool! who does not want us to amuse ourselves!’

All the women find fault with the husband, and Félicité, who does not show any inclination to obey him, remains standing on the board of the swing, and calls out:

‘Why should I come down, as I like to stop here? What is the matter with you, Cadet? Just leave us alone; Bouchard, go on swinging me.’

‘Bouchard, I forbid you to swing my wife——’

‘Cadet, I will be swung; all these girls have been.’

‘But you are not a girl, you are my half, my other half——’

‘What of that?’

‘And then, you have not been swinging like the other girls; they were sitting, and you stand up in the swing.’

‘Standing up, or sitting down, what is the difference?’

‘Félicité, your innocence carries you too far. I must explain the danger to you later on.’

‘But Geneviève was standing up.’

‘Yes, but I did not remain so long, for I was too much afraid of falling out.’

‘Well, I am not afraid, and I think it much nicer; so, therefore, give me a little push, Bouchard, and then I can manage it myself.’

‘Bouchard, I forbid you to push my wife.’

‘Don’t listen to him; send him away. Go and play billiards, and leave us alone!’

‘However, instead of going, Cadet caught hold of the swing, and seemed as if he were about to pull his wife off, at which all who were there called out:

‘Don’t give way, Félicité, don’t let go the rope; your husband is a regular tyrant.’ And the young wife, half laughing, half angry, manages to resist her husband till Madame Boulafour comes and shouts out:

‘What is the matter? Quarrelling already? and nobody there to receive M. Poupard, who has just come and wants some refreshment.’

‘My employer has arrived,’ Cadet exclaimed, letting his wife go; ‘I must be civil to him and get him some.’

When her husband does not wish to pull her down any longer, Félicité gets out of the swing and says to her mother:

‘My husband does not set to work very well at first; he actually objects to my amusing myself like the rest; but he is quite mistaken if he thinks I am going to do just as he pleases, for I am going to do as I please.’

‘Be quiet, Félicité; be quiet, my child. You shall be mistress, but you must not do anything suddenly; pretend to listen to him, and you can do what you like all the same.’

‘I did not give way, mother, because I want to be on a proper footing with my husband. Did you give way to my father yourself?’

‘Never!’

‘Very well, then, so I suppose I am right.’

Cadet found his employer, who was already sitting before a bottle of wine.

‘How are you, my dear M. Poupard? I am very glad that you have come.’

‘I made haste, for I did not want to be late for dinner.’

‘We should have waited for you, for I would not have had a potato put on the table till you came; but I hope you have been to Madame Dartinelle’s?’

‘Your wife’s god-mother? I should think so, as I agreed to go, for when I say a thing I do it.’

‘I know that; and did she give you that pretty present, the dressing jacket, which she showed us?’

‘Of course she did; she gave it me wrapped up

in paper, and I have just left it at your new house.'

'That is all right; and Aunt Nicoud let you go in?'

'Yes; she did not speak, but only smiled pleasantly, for she was just going to make her soup.'

'Poor old aunt, she is always making soup. I asked her to come and dine with us, but she refused, and said: "No, I had rather stop at home and keep house and make some good soup." But I say, where did you put my wife's present from her god-mother?'

'I put it on the bed, as I promised, so that she cannot help seeing it when she is going to retire.'

'That's all right; what a joke, and how surprised she will be? How do you like the wine, M. Poupard?'

'It is not bad; I have drank better, but it is not bad.'

'That is the sort of wine we shall have at dinner, and we shall have the same at dessert; but I will tell you something. At supper, you know, Madame Dartinelle's brother has promised us champagne.'

'You must take care, Cadet, for don't you see on your wedding day——. You understand what I mean?'

'Oh, you need not be alarmed; I have a strong head and don't easily get drunk.'

'Where is your wife? You must take me to her so that I may congratulate her and give her a kiss.'

'I will take you immediately, and you may kiss her as much as ever you like; but I told the grooms-men that I was not going to have them shoving their noses up against my wife's soft cheeks. But, hang it! I left Félicité in the swing.'

'Well, where is the harm?'

'Well, I will tell you something; my wife will swing standing up.'

'Well, that shows that she is not frightened.'

‘Yes, but I am afraid. In swinging, petticoats are apt to fly up, and Bouchard has already seen her garters, and I object to this. Come along; I would not have had the wedding entertainment here if I had known that there was a swing.

CHAPTER X

THE GARTERS.

FELICITE was not in the swing any more, which restored her husband’s good temper; but everybody was hungry and in a hurry for dinner; the men that they might eat and drink, and the women that they might dance as soon as it was over; and so, when the innkeeper came to announce that he was quite ready to send it up, he was greeted with shouts of applause.

A long table was laid in the largest room of the establishment. Over his door the landlord has put the announcement; *A room in which a hundred people can dine*, and though there are only forty-two guests at the wedding dinner they can hardly all find room.

‘Why did you not put us into your room which holds a hundred people?’ the husband asked him.

‘This is it.’

‘Then why are we packed together like herrings in a barrel, when there are only forty-two of us, and three of them children?’

‘You are all so fat; and then, just look at the ladies’ dresses and their crinolines, they take up double room.’

‘I like being squeezed,’ Bouchard, the best man, says, who is seated on the left hand of the bride.

M. Fouillaupot at first insists on sitting by his wife, but is told that that is never done, and that he must be satisfied with sitting opposite to her; so he has his mother-in-law and one of Félicité’s cousins on either side of him, whilst her neighbours are the best man, Bouchard, and M. Poupard, her husband’s employer. Bouchard, who is one of the village wags, tries to make her laugh at his jokes, which are not always of the most innocent kind; and M. Poupard, whilst doing ample justice to the repast, keeps saying to Félicité:

‘My dear child, this is the happiest day of your life.’

‘Do you think so, monsieur?’ she asked him, with a mischievous smile.

‘It is well known, my dear girl, that anybody’s wedding-day is the happiest day of their life.’

‘Then the other days are not so nice?’

‘Of course not; for just look here, to-day you have an excellent, I might say a magnificent, dinner, but you will not have such a good dinner every day when you are in housekeeping.’

‘But, monsieur, the only thing I got married for was to eat.’

‘A woman gets married for something very different than merely to eat,’ Bouchard interrupted her, with his loud, stupid laughter. ‘Don’t you know, Papa Poupard, that girls guess very well that there is something much more interesting in the pleasures of matrimony than a good leg of mutton. Ha! ha! ha! And then, the pretty little bride has a pair of eyes which seem to say that she is not frightened to stand up on the swing. Ho! ho! ho!’

‘Bouchard, I will not have you talking nonsense to my wife,’ Fouillaupot says, looking furiously at the groomsman,

‘Here is one of mine; put it in your buttonhole, and it will have just the same effect.’

The best man received this present with a sort of grimace, that seemed to say that this second garter had not by any means the same effect upon him as the other; but, of course, he was obliged to put it into his buttonhole, at which all the guests laughed, whilst the girls looked at him mockingly, and said: ‘Just look at Madame Boulafour’s cavalier!’

At dessert they sang, as is still customary at village weddings, for amongst the guests there is always some man with a good voice who likes to make himself heard, and some girls who like to be asked. At Cadet Fouillaupot’s, Rustaud is the man with the good voice, and he, who is glad that he is married, and who leaves his wife at home, sings ribald songs, in which husbands whose wives make them wear horns are made great fun of. This makes the women laugh very much, but Cadet does not like it, and calls out:

‘Rustaud, you choose a funny sort of songs for a wedding!’

‘Aren’t they very funny? One likes to laugh a little.’

‘But I don’t like to have all husbands made to look like a pack of old donkeys. Give us another song, and not on the same subject.’

‘Come, Bouchard,’ the cousin says, ‘you know a lot of songs; let us hear one.’

But the best man refuses to sing, for he is in a bad temper ever since he has been obliged to wear Madame Boulafour’s garter.

‘Master,’ Cadet observes, ‘do not you, who know so many things, and are so gallant towards the ladies, know some ancient refrains, like those old fellows used to sing in the time of the Greeks and Romans?’

‘My dear friend,’ M. Poupard replied, ‘I know

nothing at all about the Romans ; and as to songs, I only know the *Complaint of the Wandering Jew* in fifty couplets, but I know the whole of it.'

'Very well, sing it to us; it will be very nice during dessert.'

Thereupon M. Poupard starts off with the *Complaint*, but at the sixth couplet nearly all the women have already left the table, whilst the men sing in chorus: 'Never, never had been heard of a man with such a beard.' The girls dance with each other till the wretched violinist of the neighbourhood arrives, with the bass viol and clarionette, which constitutes the whole band; and the men of the party are obliged to leave the table to dance with the ladies, although some insist on remaining seated, as they find themselves very comfortable, and some, who are already heated by drink, come and dance in their shirt sleeves.

Cadet opens the ball with his wife, who dances very nicely, whilst he does nothing but jump about, like a fool, as high as he can, kicking all those who are unlucky enough to come near him; his wife herself receives one, and is obliged to be on her guard against her husband, to whom she says:

'Cadet, do put some restraint on your legs; you throw them up much too high.'

'Why, dear wife, when one dances on one's wedding day, one ought to do it with all one's heart.'

'But that is no reason why you should kick everybody.'

After the husband had had his turn everyone wished to dance with the wife, and he is obliged, in spite of his jealousy, to allow other men to act as her partner, but to console himself he goes and drinks with M. Poupard, to whom he says:

'Is the present on the bed?'

'Yes, my friend.'

'Will she see it easily?'

‘It is right in the middle, on the outside.’

‘How surprised she will be! I wish it were time.’

The ball is at its height, for in the evening many people who have not been to the wedding dinner have come in, when, about eight o’clock, Madame Dartinelle and her party arrive, for all the neighbours have met at her house so that they may go to the ball together. Oswald Lambert is with them, having arrived at Madame Dartinelle’s after dinner, and the others who are in the bet have taken him aside to ask him what plan he has thought of for preventing Fouillaupot from taking his wife home before the end of the ball; but the only answer he gives them, with a self-satisfied air, is:

‘Gentlemen, I have not asked you by what means you hope to succeed in your enterprise, so please to allow me to keep my own secret, and we shall see in the end who has been the cleverest.’

‘The devil!’ said fat George; ‘it seems to be something very ingenious, and Oswald is afraid that somebody will steal his idea from him. Well, gentlemen, let each of us do as he pleases, and he who wins shall treat all the others to a dinner at Brebant’s.’

CHAPTER XI.

THE DIFFERENT EXPEDIENTS.

THE entrance of Hortense and of her party of five ladies and gentlemen naturally created a sensation at this country wedding. Some of those who were dancing in their shirt sleeves ran off to put on their coats, and the women, whose dresses were already tumbled, went in search of looking glasses to

arrange their toilettes ; but whilst Félicité hastened to receive her god-mother, George called out to the dancers :

‘ Gentlemen, pray do not disturb yourselves, for we know that etiquette is banished from this ball so that it will be all the more amusing, and by way of a beginning I should like to drink the bride’s health.’

As soon as anyone mentions the word *drinking* to a peasant he is sure to get on, and so the words of Hortense’s brother were received with a storm of *bravos*. Everyone was eager to clink glasses with him, and some old fellows went so far as to tap him on the stomach, to let him see with what esteem his words inspired them.

The dancing begins afresh. George dances with the bride, and Fouillaupot has his wife’s orders to ask her god-mother, and not to kick her; and although he obeys Félicité, he hopes that the beautiful lady will not accept him for a partner. He is mistaken, however, for Hortense wishes to show her respect for her god-daughter by dancing with her husband. A quadrille is formed, which is made up of the bride and George Varicourt, with her god-mother and Cadet for their *vis-à-vis*, whilst on the sides Madame Rocaille is dancing with Oswald, and Madame Brochenbiche with M. Rocaille. Gontran has not asked anybody, but is satisfied with watching the quadrille, and especially the bride, who would like, now and then, to give him a furtive look; but Hortense never takes her eyes off her god-daughter, and as the latter remembers her god-mother’s advice she does not venture to look at the young man too much, who is standing near her, laughing in his sleeve when he sees the garter in the husband’s buttonhole.

The handsome widow also perceives the peculiar decoration that Cadet is wearing, and asks him what he has got there,

'It is one of my wife's garters,' he replies, 'which was taken off her leg during dinner.'

'But I always thought that the garter was the property of the groomsman who took it off.'

'I have altered all that, madame, for I did not want Bouchard, who is my best man, to go fiddling about my wife's ankles, and so I told little Justin, a child of seven, to take off my wife's garter; that was soon done, and then I got hold of the bit of elastic which Bouchard wished to prevent me having. But I will tell you something: I am not going to let a joker like him wear that emblem of the diameter of my wife's leg.'

'You are jealous, Monsieur Fouillaupot.'

'Yes, madame, I will not deny it; I am a regular tiger in the matter of fidelity. As to the other garter, which is going to be taken off after supper, I intend that for my employer, who is certain not to make a bad use of it.'

'You are surely not going to take the bride's garter again! I thought it was only done once.'

'Well, we are going to do it at supper also, as my employer would like to have the other garter.'

'Do you think he will care about it? I can hardly believe it.'

'Yes, I am sure he will put it on the glass by the side of his clock.'

Madame Dartinelle cannot persist, but when the quadrille is over she goes and takes her god-daughter's arm, and whispers to her:

'Your husband wants to have your other garter taken off after supper.'

'Are you sure, god-mother?'

'Quite sure; but have you another?'

'Of course not; you know I gave it to that gentleman; suppose I ask him to give it me back?'

'What is the good of that? You do not suppose

he has got it here? M. Gontran did not come to your ball in his cap.'

'Naturally he did not; well, so much the worse, for they will not find the other, and I shall say that I have lost it.'

'Has M. Gontran asked you to dance with him?'

'Yes, god-mother; I am going to dance with him next. I had promised to dance with Rustaud, but of course in order to dance with a gentleman of your party, I told Rustaud that I would dance with him another time.'

'Take care, Félicité, for that *gentleman of my party* is an accomplished gallant, so do not talk with him too much; he is quite capable of asking you to meet him.'

'If he did, I should just laugh at him.'

'Remember that your husband is very jealous, and never loses sight of you.'

'Yes, but Cadet must not worry me too much with his jealousy. He was very silly about the swing, and I begin to think I was wrong in marrying him.'

'Don't speak like that; your husband is very fond of you, so you must forgive him; he will soon get over that sort of thing.'

The band gave the signal, the different sets in the quadrille were formed, and this time Gontran takes the bride's hand to dance with her. Bouchard and a young girl are already opposite to them, but soon Hortense arrives with Rocaille, and Cadet forces the groomsman to give up his place, and says to him:

'Look here, Bouchard, you can get out of this as quick as you like when my wife's god-mother wants to dance, for she has a right to dance with everybody, or alone if she pleases.'

The best man makes a grimace, but goes and takes up his position somewhere else. Gontran smiles at seeing that *the handsome widow* wishes to

dance in his set in the quadrille so as to watch his conduct with the bride, and evinces the most lively pleasure at being Felicité's partner, to whom he whispers all the foolish things that come into his head. The bride is as ruddy as a cherry, for though her partner's compliments flatter her, yet her god-mother's looks disturb her, and she is too embarrassed to laugh; but she says to him, in a low voice:

'What have you done with my garter?'

'I have it still; I am wearing it next my heart.'

'Oh! what a story teller.'

'You may ascertain for yourself if you like.'

'A nice idea that! Will you give it me back?'

'Yes, in return for a kiss, which you owe me, by the way, for you promised me one.'

'When I promised it you I was not married, and you ought to have taken it.'

'You are quite right; I was foolish, but I will make up for it.'

'Please do be kind, for I will tell you how you can give me back my garter without anybody knowing that you had it.'

'Tell me how.'

'You know the cottage where I am going to live with my husband?'

'Yes, certainly I do.'

'Well, it is not far from here, and you go past it to go back to my god-mother's house.'

'Well?'

'By and bye, when you leave, you can go into our house for a moment, for the door is only latched; Aunt Nicoud will not say anything to you, for perhaps she will not even see you; and you can throw my garter on to the staircase, or wherever you like, and he will think I lost it there.'

'This is a very good idea of yours.'

'Why are you laughing? Doesn't it suit you?'

‘Certainly not; in the first place I have no wish whatever to leave, and then I do not intend to give up the garter except in return for a kiss; and that is all that I have got to say.’

‘How unkind you are! And where am I to give you the kiss? Everybody is looking at us.’

‘Not here, certainly; but just come for a moment to the place where you wish me to deposit the garter. You surely have the right to go home for a minute?’

‘Hold your tongue, monsieur; you have no business to make such a proposition to me, for I shall go home with nobody but my husband.’

‘Then I shall keep the garter.’

‘My god-mother was quite right; you are a cajoler.’

‘Oh! your god-mother told you that, did she? How charming you look! your head-dress gives you such a knowing look.’

‘Don’t talk so much, my god-mother is looking at us.’

‘What do I care? She must see that I think you are charming.’

‘I do not want her to think so; and suppose that Cadet notices it also?’

‘It does not matter; you must let him know his proper place.’

‘I will not dance with you any longer.’

‘Very well then, we will try the next waltz.’

‘Waltz! I should like to see Cadet letting me waltz! And besides that, I cannot do it, for it turns me giddy directly.’

As soon as the quadrille is finished, Cadet, who has not lost sight of his wife during the whole time, goes and takes her by the arm, and whispers:

‘You shall not dance with that fine gentleman any more; do you hear, wife?’

‘Why should I not, if he asks me again?’

‘Because he talks to you too much, and comes too close to you when he is dancing with you, and does nothing but look at you. What did he say to you?’

You were as red as a crawfish whilst you were listening to him.'

'He said pretty things to me, like all gentlemen from Paris do; and if I was red, the reason was that I was very hot. I am sure I dance enough to make me so.'

'You were hot when you were dancing with me, but you did not look like a crawfish.'

'What a nuisance you are!'

'I am much obliged to you; that is a very pretty compliment to pay me on our wedding day.'

'Then why on earth do you let everybody see how jealous you are? Don't you think that that elegant gentleman is in love with me?'

'Félicité, it is all very well for him to think you pretty; I allow him to do so, for I am of the same opinion, but I do not choose him to dance with you again.'

Dancing goes on for some time longer, but George Varicourt has given his orders to the innkeeper, and soon supper is announced, and all the company are invited to it. They receive the announcement with exclamations of delight, for those who have dined well have digested their dinner by dancing, and those who were not at the wedding dinner are very hungry; so they all make haste to sit down. Cadet showed a great inclination to carry his wife off home, but she goes and sits down by her god-mother, whilst fat George takes possession of the husband, and says to him:

'Come and sit by me, for I want to see whether you are able to hold your own against me and have a strong head. As you are fond of champagne, we will not drink anything else, for it is a wine that never makes you drunk.'

'Don't be too sure of that, Fouillaupot,' Rustaud calls out, 'for it gets into your head very soon.'

‘All right; that is my business, and you can be quiet.’

‘What did he say?’ the peasant asks Rocaille, who is sitting next to him; and he answers immediately :

‘He said that you were a fool.’

Rustaud knits his brows and bites his lips, but does not say a word, whilst Madame Dartinelle, who has put her god-daughter between herself and Madame Brochenbiche, looks at Gontran with a mocking smile, as much as to say :

‘Come and attack her now if you can, well guarded as she is.’

M. Lambert, who has danced very little, and who has gone out several times during the ball, comes back when they are at supper and says :

‘Ladies and gentlemen, you seem very secure here, but I suppose you do not know that there are thieves in your neighbourhood?’

‘Thieves?’ everybody exclaims, in a chorus.

‘Who ever saw any thieves about here?’ Cadet asks.

‘I did not see them myself, but just now, when I had gone into the garden to get a mouthful of fresh air, I distinctly heard cries of *Thieves! Thieves!* in the road.’

‘Well,’ Bouchard says, ‘I am not at all frightened of being robbed, for I have not a penny in my house.’

‘I have only my wife,’ Rustaud says, ‘and nobody will steal her.’

‘But there have never been any thieves in the village,’ Mamma Boulafour observes.

Félicité is very uneasy, and says : ‘Our door is only latched; Aunt Nicoud is very deaf; just suppose they went to us! I have a great mind to go with my mother and lock the house up.’

But Madame Dartinelle reassures her god-daughter, and says to her :

‘You need not be in the least alarmed; don’t you see that these pretended thieves are nothing but an invention of that gentleman, to play some trick upon your husband? From some words that my brother let fall, I gathered that he and his friends had entered into some plot to keep you very late and to get rid of poor Cadet.’

‘You don’t mean that, god-mother? Well, then, I need not be frightened, but I am much amused, on the contrary.’

In the meanwhile the bridegroom gets up from supper and goes to an open window, saying:

‘Let us see if they are calling out *Thieves!* any more; for, of course, if they were to attack anybody, we should go to their assistance—shouldn’t we, you other fellows?’

‘Why, naturally we should all go; but there is nothing to be heard or seen.’

M. Oswald had brought two street boys with him from Paris, whom he had paid to cry *Thieves!* in the village, when he thought the proper moment had arrived to throw the wedding party into confusion.

The two boys had shouted out a little before the company had sat down to supper, but in the midst of the general uproar, the noise of the plates, the clinking of glasses, and the shouts of laughter of the company—and country people laugh very loud—their cries had not been heard, and this was why the inventor of the trick had thought it necessary to tell the guests that thieves were about. But, vexed at the ill success of his *ruse*, and very angry with the young rascals whom he had paid, and who were not shouting whilst Cadet is listening at the window, the young man goes out again to give the boys a good scolding, and to order them to do something for their money.

When he is outside the village, he looks all about, but sees nothing of the youngsters; so he strikes

into a path on the right, where he thought he saw somebody. He goes on, he hears footsteps and calls out, and in the distance he hears cries of *Thieves! Thieves!* He runs in that direction, muttering to himself: 'Where the devil are they shouting, the young fools? They are going away from the inn, instead of coming nearer to it. *Hullo there! stop!*'

But his shouts are not heard, and those of *Thieves!* get more and more distant, when suddenly two gendarmes emerge from a path and stand in front of Oswald, saying: 'Where are you running to like that in the middle of the night?' 'I running? I was not running. That is to say, I was——' 'That is to say, you don't know what answer to give us, and down there there were cries of *Thieves!* You are the thief, for you were running away.' 'I a thief! You are joking, I suppose?' 'To show you that we are not joking, we shall take you to the police-station with us.' 'Do you mean to say that you are going to arrest me?' 'Of course we are; it is our duty to?' 'But I am one of M. Fouillaupot's wedding guests at the inn yonder.' 'If you were one of the wedding party you would not be out here in the fields in the middle of the night. Somebody has been shouting out *Thieves!* and they are shouting after you; that is as clear as that two and two are four. Come on.' 'But, gendarme, do take me to Fouillaupot's wedding, and you will see that they will recognise me.' 'Oh yes, of course, so that you may have a chance of escaping in the darkness! We are not so stupid. You will have to pass the night at the station, and to-morrow morning we will see whether you are innocent or not.' 'It's terrible, abominable; and you shall pay for this.' 'All right, all right, we know all about that. To-morrow is another day.'

And in spite of his protestations and resistance the fine gentleman is taken off and put into the lock-up.

Whilst this was going on, Cadet Fouillaupot, who was tired of looking out of the window for nothing, goes and sits down at the table again by the side of his host, who fills his glass with champagne, saying: 'Well, what about the thieves? I did not hear the slightest noise. It is a joke of our friend Lambert's.'

'I do believe you are right, but it is a very poor joke. Why! he is not here any longer; I wonder where he has got to?'

'Don't bother yourself about that, but let us drink.'

'Yes, let us drink by all means; your champagne is capital. You must not spare it. Well, you know, I must take my wife home soon.'

'There is no hurry about that; you have plenty of time to be with her.'

'Yes, but to-night! This is the grand day.'

'Have some more drink; love is for all time, but you do not get this wine every day.'

Several others, who have not, like the bridegroom, had champagne, get up and hold out their glasses to Hortense's brother, and say:

'Please give us a drop of that wine, monsieur, if there is any to spare, so that we may have the honour of drinking and clinking glasses with you.'

George refuses no one; he keeps pouring out champagne, and every moment he is being asked to *hob-nob*, so that he drinks a great deal more than Cadet, and in a short time he is drunk, whilst the husband is still sober.

M. Rustaud meanwhile has held out his glass very frequently for champagne, and begins to feel rather tipsy; that wine, which he has never drank before, gets into his head, and he begins to get quarrelsome in his cups. Rocaille told him that the bridegroom had called him a fool, and he has not forgotten this, so he suddenly calls out to Cadet:

'You like to be treated to champagne, but that is

no reason why you should call other people fools; if this were not your wedding day, I would give you a sound thrashing.'

Cadet opens his eyes wide, looks at Rustaud, and says:

'Whatever is the matter with the fellow? What have you got hold of Rustaud? Whom are you talking to?'

'To you, who called me a fool.'

'I never called you a fool; I don't know what you mean.'

'What, not just now, when I said: "Take care of the champagne, for it gets into your head," you did not tell me that I was a fool?'

'I tell you again that it is not true, and that anyone who told you so was trying to make fun of you.'

Thereupon the peasant turned to Rocaille, who was on his left, and said:

"Look here, I say, it was you who told me, and I suppose you wanted to poke your fun at me, and you treated me like a fool.'

'I? But I only said: *I thought I heard*—— Perhaps I was mistaken——'

'*I thought, I thought*; all that is no reason. What right had you, I should like to know, to call me a fool.'

'Oh! don't bother me, you peasant fellow; I said that just like I may say anything else; do leave me alone!'

'Indeed! You think because you wear a dress coat, and have gold studs in your shirt, that you can make fun of me with impunity; but let me tell you I am just as good as you are, in spite of my jacket, and a man is a man, and you shall beg my pardon for having insulted me.'

'Get along, my good fellow; you are drunk and don't know what you talking about.'

‘Oh, I am drunk, am I? I don’t know what I am talking about, don’t I? Well, I will just let you know that I know very well what I am doing.’

With these words Rustaud rushed at M. Rocaille, and gave him a tremendous blow in the face with his fist. At his cries the others rise and get between the two men, but they have great difficulty in pulling the peasant off, who keeps hammering away at his opponent, and saying :

‘Hit me back, you coward ! Why don’t you defend yourself, you lazy brute ? Just look at this fellow, who does not even choose to fight !’

At last they manage to get hold of Rustaud, who wishes to fight everybody in his drunkenness, and lock him up in a closet. As for the wretched Rocaille, he has a terrible black eye and his nose is damaged ; so he gets up in a rage, puts his pocket handkerchief to his face, and calls out to his wife ;

‘Let us go, Léocadie ; I have had enough of village weddings ; you will never catch me at another.’

But his wife, who is enjoying herself very well, because Bouchard the best man is very attentive to her, replied :

‘My dear, I have just been asked for another quadrille ; so you can go if you like, and I will go home when Madame Brochenbiche does, whose husband has gone to bed. What poor sort of men these husbands are !’

Rocaille hesitates, but as thieves had been mentioned, he does not care about going home alone ; so he goes and sits in a corner, bathing his eye. When quiet is restored, after Rustaud has been turned out, George says to the husband, in an insinuating voice :

‘My dear Fouillaupot, we have forgotten one thing by which I set great store.’

‘What can it be, monsieur ?’

‘The bride’s garter, which has not been taken off, and which I should like to wear in my buttonhole; and, though you have one already, I, at least, ought to have the other.’

‘You, monsieur?’

‘Certainly; why not?’

‘Well, I have already promised the other to M. Poupard, my employer. Did not I promise you the bride’s other garter, M. Poupard?’

‘Yes, you did; but I shall feel very glad and honoured to give it up to the gentleman who has given us the champagne.’

Cadet cannot refuse, but bites his lips with rage.

‘Very well; but who will take the garter? If I were not so stout, I would already be under the table.’

‘It would hardly be worth your while, monsieur,’ Félicité said, blushing; ‘for you will not find anything, as I have lost my other garter.’

‘Lost it! O dear, I am very sorry for that.’

Cadet, who thinks that his wife said that in order to be left alone, smiles, rubs his hands, and says:

‘After all, that is a very small misfortune. Your good health, M. George. Félicité, I will buy you another pair of elastic garters.’

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT WAS MISSING IN THE HOUSE OF THE NEWLY-MARRIED COUPLE.

GONTRAN could not help smiling when Félicité declared that she had lost her garter, and said to himself:

‘The other men have not succeeded very well in their attempts. M. Lambert’s “thieves” were a failure. I wonder what has become of him? He has evidently given it up. That unhappy Rocaille, who wanted to make others fight, has himself got a thrashing; and George, who intended to make the husband drunk—who, however, has kept quite sober—will soon be asleep under the table. I am the only one left capable of acting as I please. *The handsome widow* never takes her eyes off me; I can see that clearly; she is waiting for what I shall do to get rid of this fierce husband. Ah! madame, you have made up your mind not to love me, or to receive my attentions; you have even declared that I shall always be quite indifferent to you; but if that is so, I should like to know why you are continually watching my slightest actions? or why you fear lest I should talk nonsense to your god-daughter, or that I should speak with her alone? I should like to know whether Félicité is not old enough, and wide awake enough—in a word, enough of a woman, to take care of herself? By Jove, her god-mother must have great fears for her virtue!’

All at once, however, the bride, as if struk by a sudden idea, gets up and beckons to her mother to leave the table and come and speak with her. The laundress immediately goes to her daughter and asks her what she wants; but before answering, Félicité takes her into a corner, where nobody can hear them.

‘Good gracious! what is all this mystery about?’ Madame Boulafour asks, as she was getting uneasy at all these precautions.

‘Why, mother, it is something that I do not wish the others to hear.’

‘Do tell me what it is, for you are frightening me.’

‘It is nothing to be frightened at, but it is something very necessary. Very soon my husband will be taking me to our new home——’

‘Of course he will; it is his right, my child; he married you for that.’

‘I am not talking about that at all; but when we furnished the house we undertook to provide everything that was necessary for housekeeping.’

‘Of course we did, and we put everything in that was wanted.’

‘No, we did not, mother; for there was one thing that we forgot.’

‘Are you sure? but then it must have been something that was not of much importance.’

‘I beg your pardon, it is most useful, I may say indispensable.’

‘Nonsense! What can it be?’

‘Cannot you guess?’

‘Of course I cannot, or I should say what it was.’

‘Well, mother, it is a chamber vase, if I must say it.’

‘A chamber vase! We must surely have put one into the house.’

‘I am sure we did not; we entirely forgot it.’

‘Upon my word that is very annoying.’

‘What can we do? for I don’t suppose we can manage without one to-night, and I don’t know what Fouillaupot will do if he cannot find one.’

‘Of course you must have one; it is a most necessary article. But never mind, dear, I shall get one at the shop, and will go for it at once.’

‘But the shop will be closed for the night, and everybody will be asleep.’

‘I don’t care for that, for I will knock so loud, that he is bound to wake up and see what I want. He knows me, so as soon as I tell him who I am and what I want, he will let me have it at once, for he is a very good sort of fellow, and I will take it to your house immediately.’

‘Poor mother! I am sorry to give you all this trouble.’

‘Why, that is not worth mentioning; don’t say a word about it, but go and sit down by your god-mother again, and by the time I get back the matter will be set right.’

Félicité did as her mother told her, and Gontran, who had followed her with his eyes, asked himself what the important matter could be about which she had been talking with Madame Boulafour.

The laundress leaves the room as soon as she can, and going out of the inn, she goes to Mathieu’s the grocer’s, who does not live far off, and the mother of the bride is a big strong woman, who is no more afraid in the middle of the night than she is in broad day. Everything is closed at the grocer’s, but Madame Boulafour knocks at the shutters as hard as she can, and calls out:

‘It is I, M. Mathieu; please open the door for me; I want something that you sell, and am in a great hurry.’

After some delay, a window on the first floor is opened, and a head, enveloped in a nightcap, is put out of the window a little, and asks:

‘What is the matter? Is there a fire in the village? But you have made a mistake, for I am not a fireman.’

‘No, M. Mathieu, there is no fire; but it is I—Madame Boulafour.’

‘What, you my dear lady, in the middle of the night! Is your daughter ill? Do you want some linseed, some honey or orange flower water?’

‘No, I do not want anything of that sort; I only want a chamber vase, and as I know that you keep them——’

‘And you have disturbed me in the middle of the night, making all that noise, for such a thing as that? Confound you!’

‘But, M. Mathieu, you do not evidently understand that I want it for the newly-married couple,

who are going to their new house to-night, and without a chamber vase. Why, it would be as bad as a sapper without his axe. Please, M. Mathieu, give me a nice one—I will leave the choice to you—and let me have it as quickly as possible.’

‘Oh! Madame Boulafour, if I had known it was for the newly-married couple! But I will look you out a nice one, and bring it to you; I shall not be long.’

‘Make haste, and I will wait for you here.’

The shopkeeper was as quick as he could be; he put on his dressing gown, looked out the article in question, wrapped it carefully in brown paper, and carried it out to the laundress.

‘Here is what you asked for, Madame Boulafour; it is a handsome and a strong one, for I have given you one of the best quality.’

‘Thank you, M. Mathieu; I knew you would do the best you could for me.’

‘I have wrapped it carefully in candle paper, so that nobody can guess what it is, should you happen to be going back to the ball with it.’

‘No, I shall take it to their house at once, and I will pay you for it to-morrow.’

‘That is all right, there is no hurry about that; but now I want to go to bed.’

‘Good night, M. Mathieu; I am sorry for having disturbed you, but you see I could not help it.’

‘I understand that; it was a case of necessity. Good night, Madame Boulafour.’

The shopkeeper goes indoors, and Félicité’s mother goes immediately towards the young people’s house, holding the nocturnal vase which she had just bought carefully in both hands, but she has not got fifty yards, when somebody takes her by the arm, and a well-known voice says:

‘Where are you going to, Madame Boulafour? This is not the way to the inn where the wedding festivities are going on.’

'Why, if it is not M. Poupard! But have you left the party already? I left you still at the table.'

'Yes, but I remained quite long enough; they were still drinking, and M. Varicourt kept on pouring out more champagne; one might get led away; in fact, as it is, I have been led away too much, for my head feels quite silly.'

'Not a bit of it: you are perfectly steady on your

'That may be, but I am a little screwed, and I felt it was time to stop and go to bed, especially as I have to go to Paris to-morrow to sue my confounded debtor. That is why I got up from the table and went off without saying a word to anyone. But why did you leave the wedding? Where are you going to, and what have you got there so carefully wrapped up in paper?'

'Why, it is something that I forgot to take to their house; in fact, it is a soup tureen, which they will be sure to want, and as I remembered it, I am going to take it there before they come.'

'Oh! a soup tureen is it? And I suppose to-morrow you will serve up their usual next morning's toast in wine and sugar for them?'

'Well, I don't exactly know what they will put into it, but in any case they will want it.'

'And are you going to take it to their house?'

'Yes.'

Well, give it me, for their cottage is some distance off, and as I must pass it on my way home, I will leave the tureen there.'

'You shall do nothing of the sort, monsieur; I would not give you the trouble.'

'It is no trouble to me, as I pass their house; so just give it to me.'

'No! no! it would only put you out and delay you.'

‘Not in the least, for I shall open the door as I pass by. Aunt Nicoud knows me, and besides that, I believe she is nearly always asleep, so I shall put down the tureen and go out again; whilst, if you went, it would keep you from your children too long; so make haste back, and do not let us have all this fuss.’

So saying, M. Poupard took the article, which was wrapped up in brown paper, which the laundress at last gave up, as she feared it might get broken in his attempts to get it from her; but as she did so she said:

‘I am letting you have it, M. Poupard, because you insist on it, and now I only do it on one condition, and that is that you do not take it out of its covering; I particularly wish it to remain wrapped up in paper.’

‘You may be quite easy on that score, dear lady; I promise you that I will not take it out, and that I will respect its covering. Oh, I see, there is some surprise in it: a bouquet, or something of that sort, as a surprise for Cadet.’

‘No, indeed, there are no flowers in it; it is not the sort of thing one puts them into.’

‘Whatever it may be, the paper shall be respected. Good night, Madame Boulafour; go back to the ball, and I will leave this at the house of the married couple and then go to bed.’

He goes off, holding the chamber vase wrapped up in paper carefully in his hands, whilst the laundress returns to the wedding, where some are dancing, whilst others are still at the table; but as soon as she sees her mother come in, Félicité runs up to her, and says: ‘Well, mother?’

‘All right, my child; I woke up M. Mathieu, who gave it me immediately.’

‘And you have already taken it to our house? You have not been long.’

‘I was going, dear, but as I left the shop I met M. Poupard, who was going home, and when he knew that I was going to take my purchase to your house, he would take charge of it, as he had to pass by your new home, and it would not put him out in the least. I did not like to give him the trouble, but he insisted so.’

‘Oh, mother, you do not mean to say that you let M. Poupard carry home our chamber vase?’

‘He does not know what it is, for M. Mathieu had wrapped it up so well in coarse paper that it was impossible to guess what was inside. I told him it was a soup tureen! You need not worry about it, for M. Poupard is a sensible man, and the article will be carried to your house without his ever guessing what it is.’

‘Well, it is very funny, all the same.’

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST NIGHT.

M. POUPARD acquits himself very faithfully of the commission which he has undertaken; he goes into the newly-married couple’s house, sees Aunt Nicoud asleep in a large armchair, and as there is no necessity for waking the good woman to give the article that he brought, he takes hold of a lamp which is burning there, and goes into the passage leading to the staircase. There he looks for a table or shelf on which to put the *tureen*, but seeing nothing, he makes up his mind to go upstairs. When he has

got there he alters his determination, and comes down again, places the article on the ground in the passage, so that anybody can see it, and then goes to replace the lamp where he took it from, in the room where Aunt Nicoud is dozing; but as he holds it very awkwardly it goes out before he can do so. He therefore puts it on the ground, in a corner, and says: 'Never mind, she does not want a light when she is asleep, and they will know where to get one from. They will find their soup tureen, and I will go to bed, for I feel quite stupid and have a headache; I must have drank too much champagne.'

M. Poupard started off home again, but someone had seen him go into the cottage, and waited most impatiently for him to come out again. This was Gontran, who had left the party almost at the same time as M. Poupard, and gone towards the abode of the bride and bridegroom, without having any fixed project; but he said to himself:

'Pretty Félicité asked me to take her garter to her house, so I suppose she wants me to see the interior of her domicile. Perhaps she intends to come before her husband, accompanied only by her bride's-maids, whom she will send back. The devil! that would be a capital arrangement, and a very favourable moment for obtaining that kiss which she owes me, and does not seem inclined to pay.'

Thus it happened that Gontran, who had arrived at the house almost simultaneously with M. Poupard, saw him go in with a tolerable-sized packet which he held carefully in his hands, and come out without it and go on his way; so the young man said to himself:

'Old Poupard has just taken something into their house; I wonder what it can be? Perhaps some nice pie which he wants them to enjoy to-morrow morning. Suppose I go and take it? But that would not trouble them, if the present is to be a

surprise, and it would be better to take something that they will want to-night. I don't see any light in the house, but I will go in, and luck may favour me, for I must play M. Fouillaupot a trick, or I shall be a laughing-stock; and as all the rest have failed, I must try and be more clever or more lucky. Hortense never took her eyes off me during supper, and I couldn't get near her god-daughter; but she must be leaving soon now.'

He went up to the cottage, raised the latch, opened the door, and, going on a couple of steps, listened, but heard nothing except Aunt Nicoud's loud snores. He went on in the passage, and said: 'Upon my word, this house is very well protected! Perhaps there is nothing to steal except the heavy furniture, and no thieves could very well carry off that! Hullo, here is the staircase; suppose I go up.'

He felt his way upstairs, and when he had got there he saw rather more clearly, because the moon was shining through the open window. 'Here I am in the nuptial chamber,' he thought to himself; 'yes, here is the recess and the bed; what can I take away that the young people will miss? The best trick I could play them would be to carry off the bed, but it is rather too heavy.'

He examined it, however, and saw something carefully wrapped up in paper lying on the outside of the bed; it is the pretty dressing jacket which is the god-mother's present, which Cadet's employer had just put there.

'What can this be?' Gontran said to himself, seizing the little parcel; 'it certainly is not what M. Poupard was carrying just now; I will take it to the window and see what is inside it.'

When he had done so, he tears open the paper in which the jacket is wrapped a little, and when he sees the fine cambric and the lace, he exclaims;

‘Why, if it is not the bride’s nightgown! What a find! I have no doubt it is a present from her husband, and I will abstract it, for its disappearance will be certain to cause a scene. But, by Jove! I hear something in the distance. Can they be coming back already? If so, I must make haste off with it.’

He ran down stairs quickly, but the passage was quite dark, and so he kicked over the lamp which M. Poupard had put there, and stumbled, so that he had to lean against the wall to save himself from falling, but dropped the article he had taken off the bed. The dressing jacket fell into the oil which had run out of the overturned lamp, and Gontran, stooping down to try and pick it up, swore like fury on getting his hands covered with oil, though he succeeded at last in finding what he had lost, which was also all over oil. Nevertheless, he put it under his arm and made for the door; but his feet knocked against something else, which rolled along in front of him, and this was the *soup tureen* which M. Poupard had put there.

‘I wonder whether this is another lamp, or a can of oil,’ he exclaimed; ‘but it shall not soil me this time.’

So saying, he bestowed a hearty kick on the brown paper in which the *nocturnal vase* was wrapped, and sent it flying out of doors, where it broke into several pieces against a great stone.

‘I think I must have broken something,’ he said as he came out. And it was high time he took his departure, for the bridal party were coming; Cadet, with his little wife on his arm, leading the way, followed by the girls and young men who had been to the ball. They were all singing, laughing and shouting, and all the men vied with each other in joking the husband for having carried off his wife too soon,

‘Too soon!’ Cadet said; why, it is three o’clock in the morning, and I think it is much too late.’

‘Cadet!’ Bouchard, the best man, called out, ‘you still owe me one of your wife’s garters, and she must give me one.’

‘No danger of that; Félicité will only give her garters to her husband, and I just advise you to try it on! You would give him a smack in the face, wouldn’t you, Félicité?’

‘I don’t know that I should give him a box on the ear, but I should certainly not give him a garter.’

‘You hear that, Bouchard? My wife would give you a very bad reception.’

‘Very well then, we will give them a nice sere-nade by and bye—won’t we, you other fellows?’

‘Of course we will.’

‘Just you dare to do it, and see with what I will drench you. Come along, wife, let us go in, for it is quite time that I enjoyed my husband’s rights.’

He opens the door, pushes his wife in before him, and, as soon as he is inside himself, he carefully bolts it so that nobody else may come in.

‘Why, it is quite dark,’ Félicité says; ‘I wonder why Aunt Nicoud has put out the lamp, for I told her to be sure and keep it alight.’

‘I suppose she went to sleep over her soup. Here, Aunt Nicoud! Don’t you see that she is asleep and snoring. Luckily, I always have matches about me to light my pipe, for I have no intention of getting married in the dark; when one has a nice little wife, one likes to see a little bit; eh, Félicité?’

‘Don’t talk nonsense, but light a match.’

‘I say, that was a capital idea of yours to say at supper that you had lost your other garter, because after that your god-mother’s brother left us in peace.’

'I said so, because it was true; I did not tell a lie.'

'You have really lost your other garter?'

'Yes.'

'Where did you lose it?'

'How stupid you are! If I knew where, I should have found it again.'

'Of course you would; how clever you are!'

As soon as there was a light, she exclaimed: 'Why there is the lamp, upset on the ground.'

'I wonder if Aunt Nicoud has taken to walking in her sleep!'

'There ought to be two candlesticks with candles in them in her room. Here they are; make haste and light them. She is as fast asleep as a top in her easy chair. Poor woman, she ought to have gone to bed.'

'Never mind; don't disturb her, and do come along, for it is no good wasting any more time here. Let us go upstairs, for I am longing to see how surprised you will be!'

'Surprised? At what?'

'You shall see.'

They go upstairs and into the bedroom. Félicité looks about, for she is surprised at not seeing what her mother had given M. Poupard to take there. As for Cadet, he goes straight to the bed, pulls the curtains, and stands thunderstruck when he perceives that Madame Dartinelle's present is not there, and murmurs: 'That is very strange; it is not there!'

'What are you looking for?'

'Something that my master was to have brought?'

'Do you know about it? Did he mention it to you? So he did not go home at once?'

'Never mind about that; I do know about it, and that is enough. But how did you hear of it?'

'Well, I suppose it is my business to look after those sort of things. I wonder wherever he can have put it?'

'He told me he had put it on the bed.'

'On the bed! I suppose you mean *under* the bed?'

'No, *on* the bed.'

'Well, it is the sort of thing that is generally put *under* and not *on* the bed.'

'Well, *on* or *under*, at any rate I do not see it. How tiresome, when I wanted to see you use it.'

'Use it before you? That would be a pretty thing.'

'Why not? What do you mean? Surely one need not stand upon ceremony between husband and wife, and it would have suited you so well.'

'I will tell you what, Cadet, if you go on talking such nonsense I shall get angry.'

'Well, you seem to be quarrelsome to-night. But where the devil can it be? Where can he have hidden it? I cannot make it out; it was wrapped up in paper.'

'Yes, so M. Poupard told me. After all, if we cannot find it, it is no great misfortune. Do you want to use it just now?'

'It is not for myself; I wanted to find it for you.'

'I do not want it in the least.'

'That may be; but I want all who were at the wedding to see you with it to-morrow.'

Félicité begins to tap with her foot, and exclaims:

'How abominable! You must be mad, Cadet, to wish all our guests to see me on it!'

'Not *on* it, but *in* it. You do not know how beautiful and big it is.'

'No matter how beautiful and big it is, one does not make use of such things before people, and if you married me to talk such nonsense I am sorry you took the trouble to do so.'

‘Nonsense! I will not have you say such things to me. I married you so that you might do what I wished, and it is you that are stupid. First of all you lose your garter, which strikes me as very awkward, for a respectable woman does not lose a garter without finding it again; and then you absolutely refuse to use, before other people, a thing which you ought to look at with affection; but I insist upon it.’

‘When, I should like to know? I have had enough of your stupidity, M. Cadet, so good-bye, for I am going back to my mother, and I do not intend to leave her till you have begged my pardon for all the nonsense that you have talked here.’

‘I forbid you to go away.’

‘Take that for your *forbidding*.’

Saying this, she gave her husband a sound slap in the face, and going quickly down stairs she opened the street door and ran to her mother’s house, which she reached before Fouillaupot had recovered from the astonishment which the box on the ear had caused him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DAY AFTER THE WEDDING.

THE next morning, at half-past eight, Félicité, who had very red eyes, because she had been crying a great deal (probably from a mixed feeling of regret at not having spent the wedding night with her husband, and at having married Cadet), accompanied her mother, to whom she had told everything that

had happened between her and her husband, started to go to Madame Dartinelle's, as they are anxious to tell her god-mother how M. Fouillaupot had behaved.

Hortense was still asleep when her maid came in to tell her that the bride and her mother particularly wished to see her.

'What! my god-daughter is up already after going to bed so late?' *the handsome widow*, exclaimed, half opening her eyes. 'That is a very unusual thing, and something out of the way must have taken place with the young couple. Very well, show them in, and I will receive them in bed as they are in such a hurry.'

Félicité and her mother make haste into the room, and, after curtseying, are both in such a hurry to tell her what has happened that they both speak at once without stopping.

'Oh, god-mother!——'

'Oh, madame!——'

'If you only knew. My wretch of a son-in-law!——'

'I never could have believed it of Cadet!——'

'If the late M. Boulafour had made such a proposal to me, I should have broken the utensil over his head——'

'And before people! before the wedding guests! Wanting me to get on to it before——'

'I said to my daughter: "Never agree to it; the whole neighbourhood will make fun of you!"'

'Agree to it! I would rather have a separation at once.'

Madame Dartinelle, who has not understood a word of all that they have been dinning into her ears, signs to the women to be quiet, and, half sitting up in bed, says:

'First of all, please do me one favour, and that is not to talk both at once, for I have not understood a

single word of what you want to tell me, except that I fancy my god-daughter has some complaint to make against her husband. Well, Félicité, let us hear all about it; but do explain yourself better, pray.'

'God-mother, this is it: When we got home there was no light, and Aunt Nicoud had upset the lamp in the passage; but that did not matter, as we lighted some candles; but I must tell you that Cadet's master, M. Poupard, had undertaken to carry a very necessary article to our house.'

Hortense smiled, and said:

'Yes, I know all about that, since I gave it to him.'

Mother and daughter looked at each other in astonishment, but at last Madame Boulafour exclaimed;

'I beg your pardon, madame, but I think you are mistaken, as I myself bought it at the shop, and made M. Mathieu get up at night and give it me, as we had forgotten it; but as I met M. Poupard, who was going home and had to pass the children's house, he would insist upon taking it himself; so you see, madame, you could not have given it him.'

'Please tell me, Madame Boulafour, what are you talking about, to begin with.'

'Good heavens! madame! I hardly know how to tell you, but it is something very necessary.'

Félicité, who is growing impatient at all her mother's hesitation, exclaims:

'Are you afraid to mention it? There is no harm in using it! Well, god-mother, it was a chamber utensil.'

'Hortense laughed heartily, and said:

'I certainly did not give that to M. Poupard, but before going to your wedding, my dear, he came here, as I had settled with your husband, as I wanted to give you a little surprise, and the two gentlemen

kept the secret very well. It is a very pretty embroidered dressing jacket, trimmed with lace, and I gave it to M. Poupard to put on your bed; that was what your husband could not find.'

'A pretty dressing jacket!' Félicité exclaimed; a present from you, which he was to put on our bed, an! Cadet knew about it? It was that, mother, that my husband wished to see me in and show me to all our guests. Poor Cadet, and I boxed his ears for that!'

'My dear child, I begin to think you were too hasty.'

'What, Félicité? You struck your husband because he wanted to see you in the dressing jacket?'

'Yes, god-mother, but I could not guess that; I thought it was something else, for M. Poupard had also undertaken to carry the — the utensil to our house, and so I thought that Cadet was talking of that, and so we were at cross purposes, both of us.'

'That comes of not calling things by their right names; then, at any rate, one knows what one is about.'

'Yes, god-mother; and after slapping my husband's face, I returned home and spent the night at my mother's.'

'That is a very serious matter, Félicité; your husband must be furious.'

'You will make it up between us, god-mother, will you not? I am sure Cadet will come and see you this morning, and you must tell him all.'

'But how about the dressing jacket? What have you done with it?'

'We could not find it; and without all these cross purposes, we could have explained the whole matter immediately.'

'You could not find it?'

'No, madame, neither the jacket nor the chamber utensil,' the laundress exclaimed; 'a nice thing to

give old Poupard commissions to execute, if he does it all like that !’

‘You must go and ask him what has become of the things which he took charge of.’

‘But we have just been to his house, and he has already gone to Paris.’

‘I cannot understand it all,’ Hortense said ; ‘there must really have been thieves in the village last night.’

At that moment a noise of talking in the yard attracted Madame Dartinelle’s attention, so she rang for the maid.

‘What is the matter down stairs ?’ she asked. ‘Are there strangers in the yard ?’

‘It is the brigadier of the gendarmes, and this is the third time he has been here this morning. He wants to speak to M. Varicourt, because he arrested a man last night.’

‘That must be the thief,’ the laundress cried.

‘The man appeals to M. Varicourt, and wants him to come and have him released.’

‘Go and tell my brother.’

‘We have called him several times, madame, and he tells us to go——. I cannot tell you what he said, madame ; and then he declared that he would not get up before dinner, and told us to let him go to sleep again.’

‘That is just like him ! But did the man who is in custody give his name ?’

‘Here is his card, madame.’

‘Why. it is M. Oswald Lambert, and he has spent the night in the lock-up ! I quite thought he had gone back to Paris. Madame Boulafour, go as quickly as you can and have the poor fellow set at liberty ; you will know him again, for he was at the wedding, and in any case they will believe you belong to the place. I have still something to say to Félicité, and you will find her here on your return.’

‘I will go and see the gendarmes, madame, but you must make it up between the two children.’

‘You need not be uneasy about that; it will be very easily managed; but I want the dressing jacket found also.’

‘Oh, yes, god-mother, I should so like to wear your pretty present.’

When Madame Boulafour had gone, Hortense made her god-daughter take a seat near her bed, and said to her:

‘And now I want to speak to you a moment. Whom do you suspect of having taken the dressing jacket from the house? for it is quite impossible that M. Poupard did not take it there; he is a very good sort of man, and would be quite incapable of playing you a practical joke. He is very fond of Cadet, and gladly undertook the commission.’

‘And he also took the utensil from mother, and insisted on taking it to our house.’

‘Well, that article is much more commonplace.’

‘At any rate, we have not found it, either; so the same person must have carried them both off.’

‘I cannot believe that. Whoever took the jacket no doubt was playing the bride a trick; but the—the other thing——’

‘That certainly was playing us a trick, also.’

‘Look here, Félicité, answer me candidly; you danced with M. Gontran, and he spoke a great deal with you whilst you were dancing together; you were blushing and laughing——’

‘Did you see it all, god-mother?’

‘Nothing escapes me, and, besides, I kept my eyes on you, and I fancy I guess what he said to you; he made love to you, and asked you to meet him?’

‘Oh! god-mother!’

‘Don’t tell stories about it, for if you do not tell me the whole truth I will not undertake to make it up between you and your husband.’

‘Well, first of all, M. Gontran told me that I was pretty, and had very nice black eyes——’

‘Well, go on! go on!’

‘And I begged him to give me back my garter, and he refused, except on one condition.’

‘What was it?’

‘That I would give him a kiss.’

‘I thought as much.’

‘You may be sure that I refused; so then he said: “Very well, I shall keep the garter.” Naturally that vexed me, so I said: “It would be very easy for you to put it somewhere in our cottage as you go past, and Cadet will believe I lost it there.”’

‘You do not mean to say that you told him to go to your house? How imprudent of you!’

‘And he immediately replied: “I will go there gladly, but on the condition that you meet me there for a moment quite alone.”’

‘What a wretch! What a shameful thing to do!’

‘But, of course, I refused, god-mother.’

‘A good thing you did; that would have been the only thing wanting, to have an assignation with a gallant on your wedding night!’

‘Well, there is no danger of my giving him one. I am fond of a little bit of fun, but it must not go too far,’

‘My dear child, when a woman is fond of a joke, it very often carries her much farther than she intends, and then she cannot stop when she would like to. However, you evidently told M. Gontran that he could easily get into your house, and you see that he made use of your information, for I am sure that he took your dressing jacket.’

‘And the chamber utensil also?’

‘How you do worry me with that utensil! I am talking about the little jacket, and, as I embroidered it myself, I think we may as well take the trouble of trying to find it.’

‘If you are certain that he took it, the only thing would be to ask him for it, for he surely cannot want to keep it; men do not wear dressing jackets.’

‘Of course not; but you do not think he will confess that he played you such a trick, so we must find some other means.’

‘What can we do, god-mother?’

‘Don’t be in a hurry; let me think a moment. Yes, if we could only——’

‘Do what?’

‘Just listen, Félicité; the first time you meet M. Gontran again—and you are sure to meet him soon, as he is going to stay here for some days longer——’

‘Well, god-mother, you may be sure I shall take good care to avoid him——’

‘Quite the contrary, for I want you to allow him to come and talk with you alone for a moment; I can easily find an opportunity for you. During that interview he will be sure to ask you to meet him so that he may return your garter.’

‘I should send him flying.’

‘Not at all; you will take a certain amount of pressing, but will yield in the end, and give him an assignation.’

‘Oh! god-mother! you cannot wish me to run such a risk?’

‘Yes I do; but you will impose one condition, and tell him that if he will restore your dressing jacket you will give him a kiss, but, if he will not, you will give him nothing at all.’

‘Oh! now I understand.’

‘You will appoint that little grotto on the left hand side, on coming into the garden, as the place of meeting——’

‘I know where you mean; but that is at your house, god-mother.’

‘Just so. It will seem quite natural for you to go

into the grotto for a moment as you leave, when you have been to see me.'

'Of course it is quite easy, but——'

'You must appoint evening, when it is almost night, for this meeting.'

'But, god-mother, at night, in the grotto, alone with that gentleman, it surely will expose me to——'

'You need not be in the least ashamed, for you will not keep the appointment.'

'Not I? who then?'

'Be quiet, and do not mention it; here is your mother.'

The laundress returned, saying:

'Yes, madame, it is one of those fine gentlemen who has spent the night in the lock-up, because they took him for a thief; but I soon told them that I had seen him here, and that he was one of your friends, and so they released him immediately.'

'Did he come back with you?'

'Not exactly; for he was much too angry with your brother, to whom he sent three times, and who would not put himself out of the way to go and identify him. He said: "I am off to Paris as quick as possible, for I have had enough of your village of Fontenay-aux-Roses and your country weddings. Give my compliments to Madame Dartinelle, but tell her brother that he need not reckon me amongst the number of his friends for the future."'

'Poor M. Oswald! It will be a lesson for him not to pretend that there are thieves about again.'

'I met M. Rocaille as I was coming back, and he has a terrible eye from the blow that that idiot Rustaud gave him, who was as drunk as the late Boulafour used to get sometimes. I told M. Rocaille how sorry I was that he had got that little *souvenir* at my daughter's wedding.'

'You need not feel the least sorry, Madame Boula-

four; for all those gentlemen have only been duly punished for the tricks they wished to play you. You see that my brother, who wished to make everybody drunk, cannot himself get up to-day. And now go home with your daughter and wait till you hear from me, for I am sure that poor Fouillaupot will soon come and confide his woes to me.'

'But oh! god-mother, you will make it all right between us? for, after all, I think I was wrong.'

'I think you were, a little; but we will try and persuade him that he was in fault.'

'And what about the dressing jacket and the—the utensil, begging your pardon? Surely M. Poupard will be obliged to give them up?'

'It is possible that it may not be he who has them.'

'Well, they told me that he would be back from Paris to-night, so I shall go and see him again.'

'God-mother, ought I now to go home with mother or return to my husband's house? I would rather go to Cadet.'

'My dear child, you must, for all that, go with your mother; for as you have slapped his face you cannot go back to him till he comes after you; but you need not be frightened, for I am quite certain he is very eager to be reconciled to you; and now go. But, Félicité, you must come and see me again by-and-bye, to hear if I have any news of the dressing jacket.'

'Yes, god-mother, yes; I understand; I will come back.'

At last Mamma Boulafour and her daughter go, and Hortense does not feel the least inclination to sleep any longer; and, seeing that it is ten o'clock, she rings for her maid, and says to herself:

'So, so, M. Gontran, you wished to make love to me, and to gain my affections, and then you try to seduce my god-daughter, and to make her forget

her duty. How disgraceful! But I will expose you, and let you see how I value your vows.'

When her maid came into the room she asked her mistress what she required.

'I want to get up and dress,' was the reply.

'You are going to get up so early the morning after a ball, instead of sleeping a little longer?'

'I am not sleepy now. Is M. Gontran in bed still, like my brother?'

'Oh! no, madame; he left his room quite early.'

'Early, after spending the night at a ball? I suppose he did not sleep; it is very strange; but dress me, and do my hair.'

'I suppose you will put on quite a plain dress, being the day after the ball?'

'What has that got to do with it? Ought one not always to be careful about one's dress?'

'Here is your dress, madame.'

'It is the same I wore yesterday morning, and I will not put it on again to-day.'

'Will you have the grey?'

'It is too wide.'

'Or the black one?'

'It does not fit well.'

'Then there is nothing left but the rose-coloured one, and that is too elegant, if you are not going out, and the day after a ball one is not much inclined——'

'How you worry me with your *day after a ball*! Give me the rose-coloured dress, and do my hair better than you did yesterday, for I was a perfect sight.'

'Oh! madame, I——'

'I tell you my hair did not suit me at all; I know that better than you, and, besides that, all the ladies told me that I looked charming; and when one woman says that to another, you may be sure that your hair is not done becomingly; for when you

look very nice, they are so vexed that they never mention it.'

The lady's maid, however, did her best to satisfy her mistress, who was much more particular about her toilette than usual, and just as *the handsome widow* had put the finishing touches to her dress, a servant came to tell her that a young peasant, called Fouillaupot, wished to have the honour of speaking to her.

'Yes, yes; show him upstairs, poor fellow,' Hortense said. 'He certainly deserves to be consoled, but I think I shall succeed in making his peace with his wife.'

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAP.

WE left Cadet Fouillaupot dumb with astonishment at the slap in the face which his wife had given him, and certainly there was good reason for it. It is surely enough to demoralise any man to receive a cuff on the head on his wedding night, when at last he is alone with the girl whom he has chosen to be his companion for life, instead of the loving kiss which he expected from her. However, when he had recovered from his stupefaction, Cadet felt very much inclined to run after his wife and bring her home; he went down stairs and walked a short distance along the passage, but then he stopped, for Cadet is rather proud, and his vanity has been deeply wounded by Félicité's conduct; so he says to himself:

'No, I will not run after her, or ask a woman who

has smacked my face to return to me. I know perfectly well that, if I chose, I could force her to come back to her home, for I am her husband, and a wife is bound to follow her husband wherever he goes. I know that, for it is law and in the code, and I read it carefully before I was married, as a husband ought to be acquainted with it, to bring his wife to book if she does anything foolish. It certainly was not much good to me just now; but that is no matter, for it will be useful later on. It seems that the dressing jacket has disappeared; I wonder if the thieves have been here? I will go and ask Aunt Nicoud.'

With some difficulty he manages to wake her up, and bawls into her ear:

'Aunt Nicoud, how did you upset your lamp in the passage there? Have you been in the dark?'

'Yes,' she answered, smiling; 'I ate it all, it was so good.'

'I am talking of your lamp, which I have just picked up; here it is.'

'My lamp! why, so it is, and there is no more oil in it.'

'I suppose not, as it has been upset; and so, seeing no light, the robbers have been in——'

'Who has been in? Your master, M. Poupard; I recognised him at once; he went upstairs with a small parcel under his arm——'

'Well, what then?'

'Men? There were no men——'

'Lord! what a lot of patience one wants with her. Just listen, Aunt Nicoud, and open your ears a bit. Thieves have been in here; have you seen them, and should you know them again?'

But he could not make her understand what he wanted, and so he made up his mind to go to bed, or rather to throw himself on to his bed, dressed just as he was, for the night was nearly gone. He meant

to get up at daybreak, and could not make up his mind to occupy the bed all by himself, when he intended to have inaugurated it with *Félicité*.

Fatigue, however, asserted its rights, and he slept for several hours; but he got up when it was broad day, and got ready to go to his employer's, when he heard laughter and talking beneath his window; and when he opened the casement he was greeted with loud *Hurras* and roars of laughter from all the village lads, with Bouchard at their head, and the latter called out:

'Bravo! for the bridegroom who has not slept with his wife! Poor, unfortunate husband! How do you feel, poor fellow?'

'How do you know that I did not sleep with my wife?' Fouillaupot asks, in a rage. 'Who told you so?'

'What a question! When your wife returned to her mother's last night, she had to knock at Madame Boulafour's door for a long time before it was opened, and in waking the laundress she also woke up all the neighbours, and they heard your wife's mother say to her daughter:

"What do you want here? Your place is beside your husband."

'And then the little woman answered: "My husband wants me to do things—which one does not do in public. Open the door, mother, and I will tell you all about it."

'Thereupon her mother opened the door, and the first thing in the morning the neighbours told their friends, who passed it on, so that now all the village knows it. But what did you want to do to your wife, Cadet? for she ran away from you as if you had been an ogre.'

Instead of answering, Cadet shut the window violently; and when he heard nobody outside his house, he went as quickly as he could to M.

Poupard's, who, however, had already gone to Paris. In despair, and not knowing what to do, the unhappy husband went and sat down under a tree for some time; and though he thought of going to his wife's god-mother, he did not dare to go so soon; but somewhat later in the morning, Cadet arrived at Madame Dartinelle's, at the moment she had finished dressing.

When he was shown into her room, the young villager was so embarrassed that he would hardly come in, but Hortense quickly reassured him:

'Come in, M. Fouillaupot; come in. I am not the least surprised at your visit; indeed, I expected you.'

'Why should you expect me, madame?'

'Because your wife and your mother have already been to see me.'

'I suppose they came to complain about me? when Félicité has made me the mock and laughing-stock of all the village. I will tell you something; they all know that I have not slept with my wife, and so I am a dishonoured man, for everybody will be pointing the finger of scorn at me, and I know that I shall die of vexation.'

'Come, come, M. Cadet, calm yourself, for matters are not so bad as you make out. In the first place, no one is dishonoured because he has not made use of his conjugal rights on his wedding night; on the contrary, it is a great proof of delicacy, and very common amongst the upper classes.'

'But in the lower classes, madame, we do not get married to show our delicacy.'

'Then all your quarrel with Félicité arises from a misunderstanding. If you had only mutually explained yourselves this would not have happened.'

'A misunderstanding? That means taking one thing for something else, does it not madame?'

'Just so.'

‘And so when Félicité caught me a smack in the face, she took me for somebody else?’

‘She thought you were asking her to do something absurd and impossible; but listen to me.’

‘Gladly, madame.’

‘I had worked a dressing jacket for my god-daughter, which M. Poupard, your employer, took to your house, and the secret was only too well kept, as it is the cause of your quarrel.’

‘I beg your pardon, madame; but it seems that Félicité knew all about it as soon as we got home, for she said: “I cannot see it; I wonder where M. Poupard has put it?”’

‘But you are mistaken, for my god-daughter was not looking for the dressing jacket, and I tell you again that she had not the slightest idea that I had sent her one.’

‘Then what she looking for?’

‘Well, a very necessary article—a chamber vase, if I must tell you. During supper she remembered that there was none in the house, and told her mother, who immediately went out to buy one, and as she was going to your new home, she met M. Poupard, who insisted on taking it there for her, not knowing what it was, as it was so well wrapped up in paper.’

‘Do you mean to say, madame, that she was really speaking of a——’

‘Your wife thought you knew it when you said: “Where can he have put it?”’

‘I certainly said that.’

‘Then you told Félicité that you wished her to use it before you and before your guests! I suppose, now, you will understand why she was angry? At first she thought you were only joking, but when she saw that you were in earnest——’

‘She boxed my ears, and she was right; she was quite right. To think that I wished her to——’

My poor little wife! I, who would not even let her show her legs in the swing. How foolish we were not to explain ourselves!'

'I hope you are not angry with her any longer, and that you will make it up.'

'Yes, madame; I will go and beg her pardon, and tell her I was speaking of the dressing jacket.'

'I think, M. Cadet, that you are rather inclined to be jealous, but if you wish to be happy in your married life, you must trust in your wife's virtue.'

'I will, madame; but I was so teased at the ball yesterday because——. I will tell you something; That fine gentlemen, your friend, kept speaking to Félicité in a low voice whilst he was dancing with her—

'M. Gontran?'

'I think that is his name.'

'M. Gontran is very lively, and likes to have his fun with every woman he meets, and so he naturally wished to do the same with your wife.'

'But he carried it too far.'

'Do not imagine that he was thinking of Félicité; he has very different thoughts in his head.'

'I don't say that he was thinking of my wife, but he joked with her too much, and I must tell you also, madame, that she has lost one of her garters. I thought at first, at supper, that she had said so in order that they might leave her legs alone; but it is true, she has really lost it.'

'Well, really, you need not worry yourself about that, for women are constantly losing their garters.'

'Do you really think that ladies often lose them?'

'You must not attach any importance to that.'

'I think you are right, and I have the other in my buttonhole. Last night, when Félicité left me, I felt inclined to pitch it to the devil; but now I am glad I kept it. My poor wife, who thought——

Well, I will go and make it up with her immediately, and as for the dressing jacket and the—the other thing, M. Poupard must tell us what has become of them.'

'Let us hope so.'

'Madame, your servant.'

'Good bye, M. Cadet! go to your wife at once.'

'I will, madame.'

And the young husband ran down stairs, and was just going to cross the yard on leaving, when Gontran, who was leaving the garden, met him, and accosted Fouillaupot in a very friendly manner.

'Why, here is the husband! Up already, and without your wife? I hope you had a pleasant night.'

Cadet did not know what answer to give to the question which Gontran put to him in an almost mocking voice; but, in trying to think of what to say, his eyes fell upon the young man's cap, and on it he saw a garter fastened, which he recognised immediately as the one which his wife said she had lost; so he got red in the face, and remained, without saying a word, in front of the man who was wearing his wife's garter on his cap.

Hortense happened to be at the window, and when she heard Gontran's voice, she saw the peasant in front of him looking very much upset, and on looking at Gontran rather more closely, she saw the unlucky garter, which was still fastened to his cap, and immediately understood why Cadet was standing there motionless and making such a queer face; so she made haste down stairs and went up to the two men.

Gontran bowed and took off his cap, whilst Hortense gave him an angry look, and said to Cadet:

'What! not gone yet? I thought you were in such a hurry to go to your wife?'

‘I was going, madame,’ he replied, with some embarrassment; ‘but I have just seen something which has quite taken me aback.’

‘What can you have seen to delay you any longer? It appears to me as if you were never going to do what you intended.’

‘But listen, madame; I think I may well be surprised at seeing a garter exactly like the one I have in my buttonhole on this gentleman’s cap.’

‘What do you mean? You surely do not think——’

‘Well, it is its twin sister! I know them well, as I bought them and gave them to Félicité a short time before we were married.’

‘What! M. Fouillaupot, is it possible?’ Gontran exclaimed, as he now understood why Hortense had looked at him so angrily; ‘does this garter belong to your wife?’

‘Yes, monsieur, it is off my wife’s leg; she told me she had lost it, but——’

‘Of course, I remember now,’ Hortense cried; ‘When Félicité came to see me the other day with her mother, she said, as she was going away: “Oh! I have lost one of my garters.” So I suppose you found this one indoors, M. Gontran?’

‘Yes, madame, I picked it up on the staircase, and used it as a strap for my cap.’

‘Well, give it back to M. Cadet immediately, for it belongs to his wife, and he ought to take it to her.’

‘You are quite right, madame. Let us render unto Cæsar—the thing which is M. Cadet’s.’

While saying this, Gontran was trying to take the garter off his cap, but he found great difficulty in succeeding, for, in order to fasten the elastic on, Félicité employed one of those big yellow pins which laundresses use, but which one never sees anywhere else.

Cadet, who had been listening rather incredulously to what had been said about the lost garter, looked at the young man, who was pricking his fingers in trying to get the pin out, and asked him, slyly:

‘I suppose you found the pin as well as the garter?’

‘Why, M. Fouillaupot?’

‘Because laundresses use them; I know them well enough, they are as strong as nails.’

‘You are quite mistaken, M. Cadet, if you think that nobody but laundresses use these pins, for I have all sorts of them: in the country one has all kinds of things which one never sees in Paris, and M. Dalby might very easily find one of these pins in my house. Good morning, M. Fouillaupot; your wife is waiting for you.’

The tall husband felt that this was a dismissal, and so he took the garter, and murmured: ‘Thank you, madame;’ adding, as he went off: ‘I hope, monsieur, you will not find it a second time.’

As soon as he was some distance off, Gontran gave free vent to his laughter; but Hortense, who did not seem to approve of his merriment, exclaimed:

‘You must confess, monsieur, that you like to do harm!’

‘I, madame! What made you think that?’

‘Well, you see this newly married man here, and you come to flaunt your cap, with his wife’s garter fastened to it, under his very nose!’

‘I assure you that I quite forgot about that when I came forward to wish him good morning. If I had remembered that unfortunate garter, I should not have come near him, or would have hidden my cap.’

‘Don’t say that, monsieur, for you delight in making this poor husband jealous; you want to bring discord into their early married life, and you hope that that will enable you more easily to triumph over my god-daughter’s virtue.’

‘Really, I do not think you ought to accuse me of that.’

‘Don’t you suppose that everyone saw that you were paying her marked attentions when you were dancing with her last night?’

‘Indeed! Did everyone notice that? I am astonished, for I thought I had taken every precaution——’

‘So you acknowledge that you are in love with *Félicité*, and that you want to seduce her?’

‘What would you have, madame? I must devote myself to some object; you repelled me when I tried to please you, and would not take pity on me, and it is only natural that I should seek some distraction.’

‘What you are saying is outrageous and abominable! You pretend to love me, and the feelings with which I inspired you are at once dispelled by the sight of a pretty irregular face which the wind happens to uncover.’

‘Oh! I assure you, madame, that not all those features were irregular.’

‘You are a monster! To try and turn a married woman’s head, to try and upset domestic happiness——’

‘I never had any intention of doing so, madame, so pray do not impute motives to me which are not mine.’

‘And this morning, monsieur, you went out the very first thing, as I am told. Can you tell me what you were doing out of doors, when you must have wanted rest?’

‘No, madame, I must acknowledge that I cannot tell you why I went out so early.’

‘Very likely, because you hoped to meet my god-daughter. It is no good for you to try and deceive me. You have surely not asked *Félicité* to meet you?’

‘I wanted to give her back her garter.’

‘Well, now you do not want to see her, as she has her garter back again.’

‘Well, I have not that pretext any longer.’

‘And you have not any other for meeting her?’

‘Why? How should I?’

‘Do not pretend to be ignorant of my meaning. And what about the dressing jacket, monsieur, which has disappeared—a present which I sent to my god-daughter; for I suppose you have found it?’

‘The dressing jacket? Was it a dressing jacket?’

‘Ah! you have acknowledged taking it.’

Gontran saw that he had said something silly, and tried to repair his fault.

‘Well, madame, I did say: “Was it a dressing jacket?” because I did not know what you were talking about. I do not understand what you mean.’

‘M. Gontran, do not tell falsehoods—they will never succeed with me. You took the jacket which I gave to my god-daughter, so give it her back, monsieur, and do not think about Félicité any more, and then I will see whether I can forgive you.’

‘I am to give back the bride’s dressing jacket.’

‘Yes, monsieur; give it me and I will return it to her, and I will tell her that I took it to make some slight alterations. She is sure to believe me, and all will be right.’

‘But madame, I cannot give it to you, for I have not got it.’

‘You have not got it! Do you mean to say that you did not take it?’

‘I acknowledge taking it, but I did not know what it was; I thought it was something of use in housekeeping.’

‘Well, it is a good thing that you acknowledge it; let me have it.’

‘But I cannot give it you, as I have not got it any longer. I do not know how it happened, but it must

have slipped from under my arm causing me to lose it in the road.'

'I do not believe it; you are not speaking the truth. You have it still, and wish to give it to Félicité herself, so that you may be able to meet her.'

'I swear to you, madame——'

'Oh! I know you, monsieur; but you shall not succeed. I will watch over my god-daughter and spoil your plans.'

'You will be quite right in watching over her, madame; but you should remember that virtue continually watched is not worth the sentinel.'

Hortense went away with her handkerchief to her eyes. Was she trying to hide her tears of rage?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GROTTTO.

GONTRAN, however, had not lied when he said he had not got the dressing jacket any longer.

After he had possessed himself of it in the nuptial chamber, it will be remembered that he was disturbed by the noise of the bridal party, and hastened to leave the cottage. In his hurry he had put the jacket, wrapped up in paper, under his arm; but as it was dark in the passage he had knocked over the lamp, kicked the chamber utensil out of doors, and had stumbled himself, nearly losing what he was carrying under his arm; but, picking it up again,

he had promptly returned to Madame Dartinelle's villa. On his arrival there he noticed that he had dropped it, for, covered with oil as it was, the paper with its contents had slipped from under his arm.

Gontran was in despair, and so angry with himself that he felt inclined to go out again and retrace his steps to try and find the parcel; but at that moment all the company were returning from the wedding and just coming in. He heard Hortense's voice telling the porter to be sure and fasten the garden gate carefully, and he could give no valid reason for going out now and running about the village at night. He was, therefore, obliged to make up his mind to wait; but the first thing in the morning he started off, and carefully examined the road which he had followed the night before on his way back from Cadet's house. He hunted in every bush and ditch, but could not find what he was looking for.

Knowing now that it was a dressing jacket that Madame Dartinelle had given to her god-daughter, he was sorry for what he had done, and if it could not be found he was determined to go to Paris and buy another. But a man always finds some difficulty in buying female garments, and especially garments of that particular kind; and he could not well ask any of the ladies to replace the article that he had abstracted. For a moment he was on the point of telling Madame Dartinelle everything, but she looked so vexed and angry that he felt more determined than ever to continue the plan which he had formed for triumphing over *the handsome widow's* indifference.

On leaving Madame Dartinelle's, Cadet Fouillaupot went towards Madame Boulafour's house, but he was thoughtful and suspicious. Since seeing that confounded garter on the fine gentleman's cap who had danced so nicely with his wife, the bridegroom had felt all his former jealousy redoubled. He wished to

make it up with Félicité, but beforehand he wished to ascertain whether there was any intrigue going on between his wife and Gontran.

Feeling thus, he arrived at his mother-in-law's, who was alone, and she received him very coldly, saying :

'Oh! here you are, monsieur. Do you expect me to compliment you on your behaviour last night? It was disgraceful to force your wife to take refuge with her mother.'

'But I did not force her to it all; she went of her own accord, after giving me a tremendous slap in the face.'

'And you thoroughly deserved it for proposing to your wife to——'

'It was all a mistake, mother-in-law; did not Madame Dartinelle explain it all to you?'

'I know you were at cross purposes; but when anybody has a nice little wife, one ought not to quarrel about trifles.'

'You are quite right, and it was my fault; I allow that; but where is Félicité?'

'She has gone out, for you may imagine that the poor child required a little distraction the day after such an unhappy wedding night.'

'And where has she gone to?'

'Well, to see one and the other friend, and then she is going back to her god-mother's.'

'I have just come from there.'

'Well, I suppose she went another way. Has M. Poupard got back from Paris?'

'Not yet.'

'Because I want to see him as soon as possible. You know that we found the fragments of the chamber vase outside your door?'

'I did not know it.'

'Yes; the broken bits of a beautiful utensil, which M. Mathieu had wrapped up so carefully in paper,

are scattered about in front of your door. M. Poupard must have let it fall as he was going in.'

'Very likely.'

'The dear man had drank too much champagne, for he staggered. It was my fault, for I ought not to have trusted him with it; but he almost took it out of my hands.'

'He may have broken that, but a dressing jacket is not breakable, and I should like to know what he has done with that?'

'That is the very reason why I am impatient for his return.'

'I should like to know where my wife is, for if we are going to spend all our time in running about after each other, it was hardly worth while to get married.'

'You should not have let her escape when you had her at home, in your own room, yesterday.'

'Confound M. Poupard! if he had not broken it that would not have happened. Where can I go and look for my wife?'

'The best thing is to wait here for her.'

'Perhaps she has gone back to our house, which we have not yet occupied together?'

'No, she said she was coming back here, so you had better wait.'

Cadet heaves a great sigh, and sits down on a heap of linen, without daring to say anything more, but he never takes his eyes off the door. At last Félicité returns, seeming rather agitated, and with a laurel twig in her hand. When she sees her husband she utters a little cry, but he gets up, runs to meet her, and kisses her several times without allowing her to speak, and she does not resist much, but only says:

'Just look, mother; he does not even ask my leave!'

'I suppose not,' the laundress says; 'his revenge

is still to come, and he is going to take something on account.'

'My dear little wife, I was wrong, and I beg your pardon,' Cadet says.

'No,' Félicité replies, 'I was too hasty; but we misunderstood each other, and it is all M. Poupard's fault.'

'Just what I said a moment ago, to your mother.'

'What can he have done with my god-mother's present? I wish he had come back from Paris, and he is not expected back till evening.'

'Where have you come from now?'

'From my god-mother's.'

'Why, you were there this morning.'

'That makes no difference, for she had something to say to me.'

'What was it?'

'You are too curious.'

'Have you been amusing yourself by breaking the branches off her laurel trees? What are you going to do with the one you have there? You ought not to break off or pick anything in other people's gardens.'

'Madame told me I might take it.'

'What for?'

'My dear Cadet, you want to know too much; but I will tell you all about it this evening.'

'This evening?'

'Yes, when I come back from my god-mother's.'

'I say, there is rather too much of your god-mother; one meets gentlemen there with whom I do not wish you to talk.'

'Are you going to begin with that absurd jealousy again? Well, only keep quiet, for you shall come with me this evening.'

'In that case I have no objection; but do you know that I have found the garter which you lost?'

'Yes, my god-mother just told me about it.'

‘It was on M. Gontran’s cap, who was swaggering about with it; I should like to know why he should fasten your garter to his cap?’

‘However should I know? For his own amusement, I suppose.’

‘Félicité, one does not amuse one’s self with objects of such importance as garters; but I can guess why he wore it: because he is in love with you.’

‘In love with me—that handsome gentleman from Paris? Why, you must be mad!’

‘Not the least; he whispered too much to you whilst you were dancing.’

‘My poor Cadet, if you only had rather more perception, you would not really believe what you have just said.’

‘I see it quite clearly.’

‘No you don’t, for you suspect something which is not a fact, and you do not see something that really exists.’

‘What is that, I should like to know?’

‘You do not see that M. Gontran is in love with my god-mother; that he has remained in this village all this time in the hope of gaining her affections, and that my god-mother, who affects the most perfect indifference towards him, is, nevertheless, sensible of his love.’

‘It is quite impossible! Do you expect me to believe that this gentleman is in love with your god-mother, and for that reason is so attentive to you, and wears your garter like a plume in his cap?’

‘Yes, of course; it is a regular scheme, a bit of his cunning to tease Madame Dartinelle.’

‘Oh! it is a scheme, is it? I should never have guessed it. You are very clever to have guessed all that, but before I believe that this fine spark is not trying to seduce you, I must be convinced that he is in love with your god-mother.’

‘You shall be convinced this very evening.’

‘Really and truly? Very well, little wife, let us be off, and settle down in our home.’

‘No, not yet; you must wait till this evening.’

‘Why wait till this evening? Why not go directly?’

‘Because, before making it up with you altogether, I want you to get quite rid of your jealous suspicions, and not believe any longer that M. Gontran is making love to me. My god-mother herself said to me: “Do not go back to your husband till he is fully convinced that M. Gontran never gave you a thought.”’

‘Well, I clearly see that my second wedding night will be my first.’

‘Félicité had exactly followed out her god-mother’s orders, and when she had gone back in the course of the day, the latter said to her:

‘Go and stroll about in the garden a little, for I am sure that M. Gontran is there. He will come and speak to you and ask you to meet him, so do as I told you: promise to meet him at half-past eight, in the grotto which is on the left-hand side as you come into the garden. I need not tell you that I shall go there instead of you, so you see, my dear girl, to what I am exposing myself for your sake!’

‘Oh! god-mother, you are a widow, and will know very well how to defend yourself.’

‘You must tell M. Gontran that he must bring back your dressing jacket.’

‘Did he take it?’

‘Who else do you think did? Well, then, this evening you will come back here at about nine o’clock with your husband.’

‘And I shall have my dressing jacket?’

‘I hope so, certainly. Go into the garden and say I have a sick headache, and that I have asked you to come again this evening; and when you go

out, I will be standing at this window. If you have promised to meet him, hold a twig of arbutus in your left hand; you understand me?’

‘Oh, yes, god-mother; I shall not forget anything.’

And Félicité ran into the garden, where she met Gontran, and did exactly as her god-mother had told her, for on leaving she had a twig of laurel in her hand, which she flourished in the air as she passed before *the handsome widow’s* window.

It is half-past eight at night, and as it is September it has been dark for some time; but the weather is fine and warm, and very pleasant for walking. However, after dinner, which is over a little before eight, Hortense retires to her own room under the pretext of a violent sick headache; fat George, who has not yet recovered from his excesses of yesterday, does not feel inclined to leave the couch on which he is lounging and smoking, so that Gontran is at perfect liberty to do as he pleases; and, after going and writing a note in his own room, he goes into the garden and into the grotto where Félicité has promised to meet him.

This artificial grotto is not very deep, but yet deep enough for anybody to be able to conceal themselves in it, and the entrance is almost concealed by lilacs, seringas, and Bengal roses. At the extreme end there is a bench of turf, and even in the daytime hardly a ray of light can penetrate in, so it may be guessed that on a September evening it was impossible to distinguish anything at all.

Gontran goes into this delightful retreat, which seemed made expressly for lovers’ meetings. Advancing a few steps he stops to listen, and hearing a gentle respiration, goes in the direction from which it comes, whispering:

‘Are you here, charming Félicité? I thought I should be the first at the place of meeting, and even feared that you would not come.’

‘Why did you fear that?’ said an agitated and almost inaudible voice.

Before answering, Gontran had reached the seat on which the person who had spoken to him is sitting, and immediately sits down by her side. He puts his arm round a small yielding waist, which he presses tenderly, but the lady tries to disengage herself, and

‘Why are you holding me so tight?’

‘How happy I am to hold you thus, against my heart.’

‘And what about my dressing jacket?’

‘We will talk of that later.’

‘I want it immediately.’

‘And I, beforehand, want that kiss which you have owed me for so long.’

‘Why do you want to kiss me?’

‘What a delightful question! Why should one wish to kiss a pretty woman? Because it gives a man an intense pleasure.’

‘Yes, when one loves; but you do not love me.’

‘What blasphemy you are uttering there? I not love you? Why, I adore you, and to prove it to you let me tell you that whilst waiting for the hour of our meeting I wrote a short poem, which was inspired by you.’

‘You wrote a poem on me?’

‘Here it is, on this paper.’

‘Do give it me, for I am most anxious to read it; a poem made on a wife of one day—I mean on me.’

‘Here it is; don’t lose the piece of paper, for if it were found it might compromise me in your god-mother’s eyes.’

‘Oh, yes! I forgot about my god-mother. Are you in love with my god-mother as well?’

‘The fair Hortense? Not the least; she is too cold, too indifferent, a mere statue which it is im-

possible to animate; whilst, as for you, your eyes are full of fire——’

‘Leave me alone.’

‘No; I want a kiss.’

‘Let me go; I will not have it!’

‘I will have it in spite of you.’

‘I hate you!’

‘That shall not stop me from kissing you.’

‘You will be sorry for it directly.’

‘I don’t believe it.’

Gontran overcomes her resistance; he takes one tries to take another; but Hortense (of course it is she who was in the grotto) gets up suddenly and pushes him away, exclaiming:

‘You are a wretch, and you shall not try to deceive me any more; for it is not *Félicité*, it is her god-mother whom you have just embraced—that *cold statue* which it was impossible to animate. Ah! you may well be dumbfounded! What do I hear? Why, I do believe he is laughing!’

And, in fact, Gontran is in fits of laughter. Hortense is furious, goes out of the grotto and into the house, where she throws herself into a low chair in the drawing-room, followed by Gontran, who, as soon as she has sat down, comes and kneels down by her side, and half laughing, half serious, looks at her with folded hands.

‘No, I will never forgive you,’ Hortense exclaimed, in her irritation; ‘so it is no good for you to ask me.’

‘But I am not asking you to forgive me, madame, and I am not kneeling to you as a culprit.’

‘You are here to ask my pardon?’

‘No, madame.’

‘That is too much! Then why are you here?’

‘In order to ask you to read the small piece of paper that I gave you.’

‘The verses that you made about *Félicité*? Per-

haps you would like me to sing them as well? Really, monsieur, you carry your assurance rather far! I do not know, but it may be allowable to seduce a woman by pretending to entertain feelings towards her which one does not really have; but to add insult to falsehood—I really did not think that you could have gone as far as that!’

‘Will you be so kind as to read my little note?’

‘So that I may see what pretty things you have said to my god-daughter? I heard quite enough of them in the grotto, I assure you. And so I am a statue? But Félicité has turned your head. You thought just now that you were holding her in your arms and embracing her in such an ardent manner——’

‘I can declare, that I never experienced so much pleasure.’

‘This is too insolent! Leave me, monsieur, for I never wish to see you or speak with you again.’

‘I will certainly go, if you order me to do so, madame; but not till you have read my note.’

‘So you are determined to torment me? Well, monsieur, as it seems that I must do as you wish, let me see your verses, but let me know what tune they go to.’

‘It will be quite enough to read them, madame.’

Hortense, who was crumpling the paper up in her hands, at last made up her mind to open it, and read as follows:

‘Will you forgive me, madame, for having turned the snare which you laid for me to my own advantage? and, having guessed that it was you who would come to the grotto, for having profited by the darkness, and pretended to feel towards your god-daughter what I have felt only for you? I have held you in my arms and kissed you, and should you still repel me, I shall retain the memory of that kiss as long as I live.’

As she read, Hortense's voice altered; and from having been dry and harsh it became soft and tender; she could hardly finish reading the letter before it fell from her hand, which, however, Gontran seized and covered with kisses without her trying to withdraw it, and she looked at him without any signs of anger, but murmured softly :

‘He knew it was I! Why, really, some men have as much wit as women.’

‘Not very often,’ Gontran replied; ‘but it does happen so occasionally. Dearest Hortense, you will let me love you at last?’

‘I suppose I must, for I do not like being compared to a statue!’

This scene took place in the drawing-room on the ground floor, the windows of which looked out into the courtyard; one of the windows were left open, so that Félicité and her husband, who had just come into the yard, stopped on hearing Madame Dartille's voice; but immediately the young wife, who was curious, like all women are, went up to the half-open window and looked in; then she gave her husband a push, and said :

‘Just look, Cadet, at what is going on in the drawing-room; I should like to know now whether you still think that M. Gontran is in love with me?’

Cadet looks in and sees the grand gentleman from Paris on his knees before the *handsome widow*, holding her hand and covering it with kisses; whereupon the delighted husband turns to his wife, kisses her also, and exclaims :

‘You are quite right. But I will tell you one thing—I was an idiot!’

Félicité gave a knowing smile; then, bowing politely, she took her departure with her husband.

M. Poupard followed them, exclaiming:

'I could never have thought that wine could make us commit such mistakes.'

'Well, you wicked man,' Hortense says, 'you have made up for all your faults; but just think of his making love to another woman in order to force me to confess that I loved him!'

'What would you have? It is a certain means of success.'

Perhaps you would like to know about the other characters that have figured in this veracious history.

I may tell you that fat George grows fatter in a most alarming fashion; that M. Rocaille still goes on buying game, which he gives to his wife, pretending that he has shot it; that his wife is still a flirt; and that M. Brochenbiche goes on feeling himself all over, to find out whereabouts his pains are.

THE END.

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